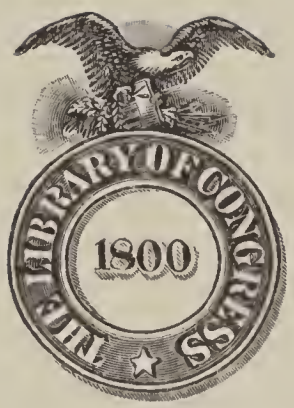
THE CHRISTIAN'S DAY
A BOOK OF MEDITATIONS

J. G. H. BARRY, D.D.



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THE CHRISTIAN'S DAY

A BOOK OF MEDITATIONS

BY

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Author of

Meditations on the Office and Work of the Holy Spirit

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Dedication

TO THE
SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF S. MARY
TO WHOSE KIND INVITATION TO
AN UNKNOWN PRIEST
TO CONDUCT A RETREAT
IS DUE THE PREPARATION OF THESE
MEDITATIONS

PREFACE

I have called this book "The Christian's Day" because the matters treated in it are such as enter the daily experience of those who are trying to live a Christian life. The meditations here contained were prepared in the form of rough notes for a retreat that I gave for the Eastern associates of the Community of S. Mary at Peekskill some years ago. They have been used many times since as the basis for meditations at retreats and quiet days that I have been called on to give. It is always unsatisfactory to work over old material for publication, and I am very sensible of a good deal of crudeness both of form and expression in these meditations as they are now printed; but as I am not sending them out as a literary exercise I have determined to let them stand as they are. Their crudeness is not of such a kind as will unfit them to become, what I publish them in the hope that they may become, aids to spiritual thoughts upon some common things of Christian experience.

S. Mary's Rectory, New York,
December the First, 1910.

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THE FIRST MEDITATION

THE FIRST MEDITATION

PRAYER

Listen to the words of our Lord —

"VERILY I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Let us picture —

A little child saying its morning prayers. It is kneeling down beside its mother repeating the words that she has taught it. It is speaking to God; and yet it sees God nowhere. It has absolute confidence that it is being heard. Mark its perfect trust in this unseen God. It is lifting a soul utterly unsullied to a God that loves purity. Try to realise the picture.

Consider, first —

That you have been that little child. There was a time when you knelt thus at your mother's knee and spoke to God the words that she had taught you. You did not know very well what the words meant, but you knew what the act meant — that you were asking One whom you could not see for his help and favor. Your childhood has gone rather dim now, but something of it comes back to you, does there not? You remember your mother, how her love guarded and followed you all her life. You can recall something of those early prayers, the perfect trust in God that was yours then. Try to recall what you were then, your love of your mother, your love of the good God of whom she taught you, the purity of your unstained soul.

Consider, second —

How far you are from all that to-day. The experience of years lies between. How your past drifts in shifting pictures across your consciousness to-day bringing to you fragments of long forgotten experience. The carelessness, the growing neglect, the wilfulness, the sin, the gradual drift from God. What memories come up out of those years. And your prayers — what has be-

come of them now? Try to realise your present state in regard to prayer.

Pray —

To be led back to that perfect trust in God that makes prayer a reality. Pray to recover the spirit of a little child, that spirit that was once yours. Cry earnestly for power to pray. O God, give me a prayerful spirit. O God, open thou my lips.

Let thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

. . . . . .

Morning by morning sleep drifts away and we come back to consciousness. It is a new day. As we awake, it may be that we hear the song of the birds in the tree outside our window. We see the flecks of sunlight on the wall and smell the fragrance of the flowers. There comes an inrush of glad life. How good it is just to be alive.

And then memory awakes. A cloud settles upon us. For an instant we had forgotten the burden that makes life a weariness; the wearing pain, the sorrow, the failure. But it comes back,

the anxiety for the sick child, the worry over the case of our friend. All the unsolved problems of life come back. The music dies out of the bird's note, the sunshine fades — we have remembered. I am the same person that I was yesterday. There is no escape.

Or we meet the sunlight with a burst of gladness. There are plans to be carried out this morning, so many things that we are eager to do, so many persons whom we are eager to see. What thronging interests there are calling us; joy, love, life await. The world is all aglow with happiness and the day all too short. The hours we have given to sleep seem lost.

Or we awake just to humdrum duty with a "middle-aged feeling." We live because we have to live, but our life is colorless. We fear little, we hope little, we love little; and we have no expectation but that to-day will be as all the other days have been.

But at least we awake Christians, and therefore with the sense of a day given, a trust from God. It is not our time, but a loan, and contains in it a call to duty. We must first of all consecrate the day. We arise with the consciousness that we are the children of God; we arise to prayer. A Christian's day is built upon prayer. It is not that we pray at times during the day,

but that the whole day is shot through with threads of prayer.

There is nothing so easy as to say prayers; we are doing that every day. There are stated times in the day when we have accustomed ourselves to kneel and repeat prayers. We know them so well, those prayers; we have been saying them for years. There is nothing so easy as to say prayers. There is nothing so hard as to pray. To speak out into the unknown and the silence with the certainty of being heard — that is a wonderful act of faith. The prayer of faith, how different that is from the easy patter of words that we often call prayer.

Look back on your life; how have you fulfilled this duty of prayer? What has this splendid privilege meant to you? God has given you the right to speak to him at any time. If you wanted to speak to the president of the United States, or the president of some great corporation, with how much difficulty would the accomplishment of your purpose be attended? But God has promised to hear you at any time; the doors of heaven are always open.

You have gone out of the church and seen children playing about the door and men loafing on the corner and the throng of the passing crowd going on indifferent, when all the time within, the

prayers and praises of the church were going up about the Altar-throne of Christ, and you have wondered that all these that pass take no notice. But are you really very different? The doors of heaven are always open. How often do you enter? The songs of the Seraphs, the music of the Harpers harping with their harps, float out. How often do you pause to listen? Prayer is the breath of a Christian's life. Is it the breath of your life? Is it that that supports you from day to day?

We have tried to pray — so we enter our defense — we have kept a certain regularity in the practice. We certainly would never think of giving it up; but there is, no doubt, a good deal that is unsatisfactory in our attainment. We are conscious of routine, for one thing; that we are carried on by the momentum of habit. We sometimes question whether, if the habit were unformed, we should exert ourselves to acquire it. For, when we think of our attainments in prayer, all sorts of questions suggest themselves. Are they not merely formal and, therefore, worthless? Are they not so full of distraction as to render them valueless? Are they not so dull and dead that they must be unacceptable? And in any case, doubts arise about them. How can we expect that God will answer prayer? Is it not

mere impertinence to expect the infinite God to attend to the petition of such an one as myself? Here are a good many questions; let us think of some of them.

You feel that your prayers are formal. Morning and evening you kneel down and the familiar words arise to your lips and flow off the tongue with the smooth even flow of water down the quiet stream. By and by you will go about your work singing and if any ask, What is the song? you will answer, Was I singing? Your prayer, it seems, has been a prayer like that — of the lips, not of the heart. And there is so much to pray about with the heart. We need so much and have so much to be thankful for. With all these thronging needs, how is it that we are not swept away by the pressing longing for their fulfilment? God is so great and wonderful and the privilege of approaching him at all is so unspeakable that it is unthinkable that when we come into his presence we should be formal.

The trouble, perhaps you thought, was that you were using a book and had got too much habituated to a certain form of words, and you got a new book or gave up the use of a book altogether. Or it was because you did not use a book and you bought one with hopefulness that new forms would bring a new earnestness. But the trouble,

you found after a little, was not there. Book or no book it is much the same thing. Formalism is not the result of using forms; formalism is a temper of mind. Formalism is, perhaps, not at all what you thought it. Formalism is a satisfaction with routine, with just keeping a rule. Mostly a formalist does not suspect himself of being such. What is commonly called formalism is usually something quite different. When one begins to suspect oneself of formalism one is well on the way to a cure.

If you have been formal you have been satisfied with your attainment. Therefore it is always well to ask, 'Am I satisfied with the way in which I say my prayers? Do I stick to the same routine, never thinking of changing my form or of supplementing it with others, never experiencing new needs that no form will cover, never driven to pour out my heart to God without thinking or caring for the words in which I express myself, only eager to get my desire before God? In such a case realise that your needs are ever so much broader than your accustomed prayers. You pray so feebly because God is so little of a need in your daily life; you have not really learned to depend on him in all things: You have too little experience of God; you do not feel acutely enough God's presence, God's help, God's

gifts. You are going on your way without God. A formalist is usually a prosperous person whose life is smooth and easy and whose desires are gratified without much effort on his part. You need to find out your spiritual poverty, that you are poor and miserable and blind and naked, and then you will find passionate need of God.

You want more love, love of God and love of your neighbor. And the best way to gain more of it is to practise it. There is no influence so broadening in the life of prayer as that of regular intercession. The world is full of needs. You have only to open your eyes to see the eager child whom the evil that is in the world through lust is enticing; you can find the weary and heavy laden everywhere. The Church fighting its battle against the powers of Darkness is fighting them in the strength that comes through the prayers of its children. The tide of the battle that seems lost may be turned by prayer. If you are dull and stupid in your prayers throw yourself in to the life of others; come to the rescue of those that are weary and oppressed. Set apart a time for intercession; make it a part of your weekly routine; if you are in earnest about it, it will speedily kindle your dull faculties and sweep you out of your routine and overflow the

allotted time. You will find yourself seeking for more time, learning to fill the chinks and crannies of your day with eager prayers that are as arrows shot up to God. Before you suspect it your formalism will have vanished.

Then there is the ever-recurring trouble about distractions. There is nothing more common than that. We have so little control over our attention that we get through our prayers with difficulty. And it seems such a terrible thing. Here we are, kneeling before God our Maker and Preserver. And we cannot so much as keep our minds fixed on the thing that we are doing. Putting ourselves in the presence of God we immediately forget him. Our thoughts run off — and on what? Trifles. Some little incident of the day; something that someone has said to us; some reply that we ought to have made and did not. Some plan for to-morrow. Or something that seems a very suggestion of the devil; some wandering thought of evil that drifts through the words of our prayers. Why is this? How can we put away God for such things?

Well, perhaps it is not quite so bad as it looks. Distractions come, not because we have a deeper interest in other things than in God, but because we have a more vivid interest. Some plan interests

us; some failure oppresses; there is a weight of sorrow or care. And after all, our minds can hold so little. We are certain that in it all we need God's help, and we are trying to ask it — but thoughts throng us. Or we are just worn out and have not the physical vitality to keep our attention fixed on the thing in hand. Distractions are often purely physical.

There is need, of course, of the constant discipline of the thoughts. Most of us have had our minds ruined, or near it, by an education that never taught us control and concentration. We were not given habits of attention to anything when our mind was being formed. So it is not strange that we have not the habit of attention in prayer. Now it is a matter of hard work — the learning of the habit of prayer. We must begin at the beginning with the attempt to acquire a keener consciousness of the presence of God, and of what reverence requires of us in that presence. We must begin our prayers with a certain effort at recollectedness, not beginning at all till we have succeeded in placing ourselves consciously in the presence of God. We shall relax no effort to attain perfect recollectedness. But we shall not be too much downcast in the frequent case of failure. Remember, the valuable thing in our prayers is the offering of the

will. We cannot control thought perfectly so that it shall never wander; but we can control the will. When you find that the mind has run off and the prayers are left far behind, then recall the mind and go on — perhaps with an act of reparation, or a repetition of the last prayer. It is sometimes possible to steady the mind by the use of some material aid. A picture or the Crucifix will often help us to concentration. If they help do not be afraid to use them.

A trouble that gives us more of perplexity and causes us more searching of heart is dryness. Its characteristic is an utter distaste for devotion. I feel myself dead to all its practices and suggestions. I drag wearily through prayers in which I feel no interest and would much rather not say. I go to services and the only joy that I get is the joy that they are over. All spirituality seems to have vanished from my life. It is a terrible state; but there is this of encouragement about it, that it is the temptation of those who have made some progress in the spiritual life. It seems that we are utterly indifferent to God; but if we were so, in fact, we should not in the least care. It seems that there is no such thing as the love of God in us; but if that were true we should not be troubled about dryness. It is just because we

really care for God that the silence of God is so terrible.

But it is a trial that has its own peculiar dangers. It brings us the great temptation to relax, to give up. What is the use of going on in this state; of saying prayers that have no heart in them, of taking part in worship which, so far as we are concerned, is of the lips only? Is it not a profanation to receive sacraments when we find no desire for them or response to them in our lives? Will it not be better for me to drop all the external practices of religion and wait till I am in a better state to resume them? No: all that is the mere suggestion of Satan. We never learn anything by cutting ourselves off from the consideration of the subject we wish to know. We never learn to love people by keeping away from them. Nor shall we learn to love God by that method. Stop your prayers and you will only grow the colder in regard to the practice.

We are tempted to think that this coolness that we experience is a punishment sent us from God. God is angry and has withdrawn himself. There is much danger in such morbid dwelling upon our faults as being so great that they have driven God away. That is not the way that God treats sinners. It was because of our faults that Christ died for us. Examine yourself carefully and re-

pent of your faults, but do not dwell morbidly upon them. Let us again remember that the test of our devotion is the will. We are wont to think that it is the emotions. We conclude that when we feel good we are good, which is by no means always the case. We like to feel the pleasant glow of emotion; the warmth of conscious joy and peace and love and gratitude. We like to feel that our Lord is very near to us. But that is the luxury of religion and we have no right to expect luxuries. The trouble is that people may feel all that and be very little affected by it. It is not uncommon for people to be affected, even to tears, by some devotional book, or a sermon, the lessons of which they never dream of putting into practice. Our Lord did not put the test in the emotions, but in the will. Not he who feels the beauty of my teaching, but who doeth my will, shall know of my doctrine. After all, the aroused feelings are but the loaves and fishes of the Gospel. And they are largely a matter of temperament; the cold person that is rarely moved emotionally may have much the better will. "Devotion is simply the prompt and ardent disposition of the will to good. True devotion and fervor of spirit do not consist in any sensible emotion experienced in prayer, but they consist in having the will always disposed and always ready to everything which is to the

glory and service of God." The feelings are altogether deceitful; examine yourself not by them, but by your obedience.

Can you obey, steadily and persistently, whatever the feeling? Can you keep on in the performance of duty however remote God seems? It is easy to serve God when all goes smoothly, when the skies are bright and the world smiles and we are successful; but when the sky is overcast and the clouds lower and God seems to withdraw his face and there is no conscious joy in service, then will we serve? There is the only adequate test. And it is a test that we must be ready for: God applies it to all.

Does God answer prayer? I suppose that all Christians can answer out of their own experience that he does. There is nothing on which there is a fuller consensus of opinion than upon that fact. And yet there come to most of us moments of doubt induced either by the present failure of our own prayers or by the strong assertions which we read that alleged answers to prayer will not stand examination and are, at most, no more than coincidence.

It is well to attend to our Lord's rule in this matter. Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. Perhaps a good many

prayers remain unanswered because we are seeking temporal things and have never cared much about the spiritual ones. Perhaps if we first prayed for conversion of the will and detachment from the world and patience and purity and so on, we should be heard, and then the other things added in their order. "God often denies the temporal things, since without the spiritual, they would prove not only prejudicial but even injurious. We murmur and complain that God is unfaithful to his promises. But let us remember that our God is a good Father, who would rather endure our complaints and murmurs than quiet and console us with pernicious gifts."

God always answers prayer, we say. Perhaps it would be better to say that he always attends to prayer, and does what is best for us. All prayer rightly offered is offered in subjection to God's will and with the implied condition that the thing asked is for the best. The withholding of what is not best is therefore a true answer to prayer. We can all, I suppose, look back in our own experience and see that there have been prayers which, had they been answered, as we wanted them answered would have been very harmful to us. We wanted them so very much and we were so hurt and discouraged because we did not get them; but now we thank God for his wis-

dom and love in withholding them. We may be certain that the same thing is true in other cases that we do not see, and over which we are perhaps grieving at present.

Delay is not refusal. Do not be impatient like the child that must be answered at once. Suppose you do pray for a long time. God, you may be sure, is listening to you and doing what is best for you. It is right for you to persist as long as you think that the thing you pray for is a right and good thing to have. But be willing to submit if God thinks otherwise.

There is a further perplexity that besets us in these days. We feel the pressure of a certain kind of speculation. We have come now to understand something of the greatness of the universe. When the universe was, so far as man's knowledge went, relatively small, and the earth was the center of it, man might not unnaturally think of God as concerning himself in a special way with the affairs of the world; but in the light of our present knowledge which reduces the earth to a place of insignificance in the universe, we can hardly flatter ourselves that we can be the special objects of the divine attention. Moreover, we now know that the universe is an orderly system acting in accordance with fixed laws; it is sheer impertinence to suppose that those laws are going to be altered that

we may avoid some disagreeable effects of them. Is the universe to be thrown out of order and its laws suspended to gratify the wish of a farmer who wants rain, or of a little child who wants a pleasure, or even of a man who wants the life of one dear to him? The order of the world and the interference of prayer are incompatible.

But argument of this sort sounds much more formidable than it actually is. Both the farmer and the child and all the rest of us are constantly interfering with the order of nature in the same sense that prayer assumes to do; and if we can interfere, it is a little difficult to see why God may not. "The supposition that there is any inconsistency in the acceptance of the constancy of natural order and a belief in the efficacy of prayer is the more unaccountable as it is obviously contradicted by analogies furnished by every day experience. The belief in the efficacy of prayer depends upon the assumption that there is somebody, somewhere, who is strong enough to deal with the earth and its contents as men deal with the things and events which they are strong enough to modify and control; and who is capable of being moved by appeals such as men make to one another."

What do we mean by the omniscience of God? Surely, not just that God knows everything that happens; or that God foreknows everything that

is going to happen. But that all that happens happens by God's will, and that he knows all things in their causes. He foreknows that it will rain here on a certain day, and why; that is, he knows all the causes that will enter into the production of the rain at the given time. He foreknows that I shall die on a certain day, and all the causes that will meet for the production of my death. He foreknows that you will receive the grace of conversion and accept or reject it, and why.

Now one of the whys, one of the causes that enter into the production of events, is prayer. The presence or the absence of your prayer has been foreseen and has determined the event — the rain, the death, the conversion and so forth. Prayer, therefore, is not an impertinence, a disorderly element in an otherwise orderly universe, but is a part of its order.

But then a terrible thought comes back to us: what losses there may have been through the failure of my intercession. God gave me the duty to intercede and I failed of my duty. We struggle against this conviction and say, God would not let the welfare of others, their gain or loss depend thus on me. But is not that precisely what God is doing all the time? Does not the welfare of the state depend on the fidelity of those who are

placed in its responsible positions? Does not the health of the community depend on the taking of certain precautions? The carelessness of a milk dealer may mean an epidemic of fever. Does not the comfort of a family depend on the father's care — his honesty or sobriety? Does not the happiness of the mother depend on the conduct of the child? There is no need to multiply instances. To make the welfare of one depend on the conduct of another is just what God is doing all the time. Why, then, should not the welfare of others, their gain or their loss, depend on your prayers?

Think, then, of the possible loss through your neglect of intercession. Loss to the kingdom of God, to the parish, to your friends and family. What losses might have been averted, what conversions wrought, what progress made in the kingdom if you had fulfilled your duty of prayer.

Let us come back to this: that we beseech God to give us grace to realise the obligation, the privilege, the responsibility of prayer, and to fulfil it more perfectly.

O God, open thou my lips.

THE SECOND MEDITATION

THE SECOND MEDITATION

MEDITATION

Listen to the words of the Prophet Ezekiel —

NOW it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the first day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God."

Let us picture —

The Jews in captivity in Babylonia, far from their own land. The work of the day is over and they sit in the evening light by the river side mourning over their sad condition. By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered thee, O Sion. Others, perhaps, forgetful of God are, as they say, making the best of cir-

cumstances. They are adjusting themselves to the land of their captivity and will become prosperous citizens there. But to others such a course seems infidelity to all that Israel has stood for, to all the promises that God has made to her. To these, no doubt, whether they think of ruined Sion or of themselves in their present evil case, the future is covered with clouds; but they are not utterly without hope. God seems to have forsaken them; but when they remember his promises, they cannot persuade themselves that that forsaking is final. And to one among them the heavens open and he sees visions of God. God is not only visible in Sion; he is visible among the captives of Chebar. God is visible to all eyes that have capacity of vision.

Consider, first —

The vision of God is possible to you. Not, perhaps, the sight of one seated upon a throne of sapphire, cherub-borne and terrible; but the vision that is seen by pure hearts of one speaking across the troubled waters of life and saying, "Come unto me." Though we dwell in the world among those who are bound captive by sin, heedless or despairing of any God at all, still, our minds being spiritually enlightened and our eyes spiritually trained, we may see the curtains of

heaven draw back and may look through and see visions of God. God is visible to all eyes that have capacity of vision.

Consider, second —

That capacity for vision is a matter of spiritual discipline. The soul sees what it is trained to see, what, in a way, it wants to see. The reason of Ezekiel's vision, why it came to Ezekiel and not to another man, is to be found, no doubt, in the preceding life of the prophet. He had trained his eye to see and his ear to hear and his mind to respond. He was no stranger to the thought of God, therefore it was not strange that God should appear to his spiritualised thought. God is visible to all eyes that have capacity of vision.

Let us, then, pray —

For the power of vision. The last words of a dying saint were, "Lord, open unto me, Lord, open unto me." Let us cry now to God, "Open unto me, that I may see." The pure in heart shall see God.

Almighty and Merciful God, unto whose everlasting blessedness we ascend, not by the frailty of the flesh, but by the activity of the soul; make

us ever, by thy inspiration, to seek after the courts of the heavenly city, and, by thy mercy, confidently to enter them; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

. . . . . .

In the preceding meditation we were thinking of prayer and its difficulties and its obligations; we did not, perhaps, touch upon its joys and its privileges as much as we might have done. Indeed, we are very far, in other respects, from having exhausted the subject. Especially there is one kind of prayer that we have not touched upon and of which the importance demands that we give it separate attention. This is meditation, or, as it is sometimes called, mental prayer, because of the predominance and leadership of the intellect in it.

The condition of our spiritual activity, of our being spiritually alive at all, is that we live near God. Words are inadequate to express this nearness, but everyone who has a real spiritual experience will understand without explanation. They know what it is to keep God continually present to the life, and the life constantly in the sight of God. God dwells in us by virtue of our incorporation into Christ at our Baptism. We are never separated from God except by the awful fact of mortal sin; but we are strangely able to

go through life with little consciousness of him. The spiritual life is the becoming conscious of God as present with us and the conduct that must certainly flow from that consciousness. We cannot be any nearer God than we are but we can come to know our nearness. Those brief moments when we know God's nearness can become frequent and our knowledge of him habitual. It is the practice of meditation that helps, perhaps more than any other practice, to make us habitually conscious of the divine presence.

Meditation is the putting of the mind into relation to some truth in order to understand it and see its bearing upon our lives and to get an impulse from it that shall lead us to action. It is an attempt to let truth influence us wholly. We try, therefore, to look all about a truth, to see it in all its bearings and from all sides. We may think that we are familiar with a truth when, in fact, we are familiar with it only from one point of view. There are others ways of looking at it that we have not yet learned and which, when we learn them, will prove immensely helpful.

But meditation is not for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity. It is spiritual understanding that we are seeking. What we are engaged in is an act of prayer. We might put it in this way: Ordinary prayer is an expression of our

attitude toward God; meditation is an appreciation of God's attitude toward us. That, of course, is an incomplete statement, for an appreciation of God's attitude toward us will at once call out an answer from us in appropriate action.

This implies hard work, and if we have been accustomed to think of prayer as anything else than that we need a new attitude. A good many people have an idea of the spiritual as of something hazy, dreamy, sentimental. They think of it as the reverse of the practical; and it comes to them with something like a shock to be told that spiritual development and the power of prayer and the enjoyment of the sacraments is to be won by downright hard work; that the solid foundation of prayer is sheer intellectual effort — effort to understand what God is, what we are, and what our relations are. Personal religion is anything but dreamy sentiment. Bishop Hamilton said, "No man is likely to do much at prayer who does not begin by looking at it in the light of a work to be prepared for and persevered in with all the earnestness we bring to bear upon subjects which are, in our opinion, at once most interesting and most necessary." Coleridge said, "Earnest prayer is the most severe of all mental exercises." Our Blessed Lord says, "The king-

dom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force."

Let us get the point of view then that prayer, and especially the prayer of meditation, is mental work. If God makes it easy for us and gives us great satisfaction in it, so much the better; that is a special grace, but we must not count upon it. There are times when the gardener may stand in his doorway and see the rain fall and water his plants without effort of his. There are other times when, if his plants are not to die, he must water them with great labor.

Meditation, I said, is the putting of the mind into relation to some truth; but it is putting much more than the mind; it is the putting of the whole personality. Our personality contains these elements, the memory, the intellect and the will. In any intelligent act all these are brought into play in greater or less degree. One or the other of them may be so dominant as to obscure the others; but the others are still acting. In an act of meditation all these elements of personality play their part, but at one moment one is dominant, at another, another, in such wise that they seem to act successively, and for our present purpose they may be treated as though that were the fact.

Let us approach our subject by way of an ex-

ample. Suppose that the subject of our meditation is to be the very common sin of anger. We will begin by an exercise of the memory. We recall what we know about the subject. What does the Holy Scripture say about anger? We can recall numerous cases from Cain down in which it is the subject of the teaching of Scripture. We remember God's attitude towards it. Then we recall our own personal experience; we have been angry a good many times, perhaps it is an habitual sin with us at least in some of its minor forms. We are easily irritated; we are put out if we fail to get our own way; we are fretful against the ordinary accidents of life; we complain a good deal; we cannot see why people cannot shut doors, or why other people's children do not behave better. On the whole the more we look into it the worse it becomes and we begin to be ashamed of ourselves.

Then let the understanding take up the facts as the memory presents them and investigate them. We begin to go into the causes of our anger; and if we are not careful the causes will become excuses. But avoiding that, let us go as deep into the subject as we can, and make the attempt to see it from every possible angle. The meaning of a truth is not so easy to get at; but we get at it the more clearly the more light we get on it.

In each new relation in which we look at it we gain new understanding of it, we are able to draw new conclusions from it. When we feel that we really understand our truth as much as we are likely to we can pass on to the judgment of our own action in the light of it. In the light of what we now see to be God's will we can take stock of ourselves, of our failures and successes.

And then having got clear the truth and our state in relation to it the will steps in. It accepts this truth as its guide. It renounces its errors and failures. It abhors its sin. It surrenders itself. It makes acts of contrition and love. It ends by resolving that the truth shall rule henceforth. It determines to avoid this sin in the future. Thus all our powers are exercised and are all brought to consecrated service. With all our powers fixed on God and the service of God, we are engaged in what is one of the most practical forms of prayer.

From this slight sketch, we can, perhaps, see how valuable the regular practice of meditation is likely to be. Indeed I am inclined to think that it would be difficult to overestimate its value. As one's experience of it deepens, this conviction deepens. As a developing and formative force in the conduct of the spiritual life it is unequaled. It is wonderful to see how the life is purified and

strengthened and advanced in sanctity as the result of the habitual practice of mental prayer. Those who have become rather disheartened about their spiritual progress; who seem to themselves to have become spiritually stagnant; who feel no reaction to the grace of the sacraments, if once they can be induced to give themselves whole-heartedly to the prayer of meditation, find in no long time, their life brightened and purified, and their souls once more going with joy along the path of holiness.

Meditation has this influence, because, among other things, it aids us to the knowledge of God. Our ordinary thought of God is superficial. It takes God for granted as acting in ways that are no doubt right, but are certainly very mysterious. Or, if we arrive at a surer knowledge of God and his works, we are apt to content ourselves with a manual of theology and a purely intellectual appreciation. But in meditation we seek to learn of God from God himself. All the facts about God that we are learning or recalling, we are learning or recalling as those who are consciously in his presence and looking to him for guidance. We are expecting, and we are right in expecting, to be led by the Spirit of Truth. This spiritual attitude, eager to know and submissive to be led, is the attitude of faith to which God finds it easy

to reveal himself; it is the attitude in which we find it easy to hear God and understand; such meditation is spiritual study performed under the direct invocation of the Holy Spirit and in the submissive and devotional frame of mind which, better than any other, makes such study profitable.

Meditation brings, too, a deeper knowledge of self; for it brings self into the most intimate contact with the will of God, and analyses all our actions in the light of God's truth. It is the most searching form of self-examination. It is not that languid, over-look of the life, with the aid of some familiar set of questions, the very familiarity of which constitutes an obstacle to any very profound self-knowledge and prevents us from seeing ourselves from any fresh and stimulating point of view. Still less is it that mere arrangement of habitual sins which we know we must have committed which is apt to be the preliminary of a confession. No: the self-examination which takes place in meditation is a microscopic survey of a small section of life. It is an attempt to appreciate our attitude in thought and action toward some one truth that we are contemplating in all the bearings upon our life, to deepen and freshen our knowledge of some one truth, to see it under new aspects and with novel applications, to have one's own obligations to the truth made

clear to one, and to have one's failings brought home. We get deeper than the perception of acts as being sins, we see the nature of the failure that is involved in them, and the kind of loss that is their consequence.

And as an immediate result, we are prepared for more profitable petitions; for petitions to be profitable must be more intelligent, the better we understand our needs, the better we can bring the force of prayer to bear upon them. Someone has said: "If you wish to learn to pray and ask of God what you need, exercise yourself in considering exactly your faults and your weaknesses, and when you shall have a perfect knowledge of them, then you will know what you ought to ask. And, like a man pressed by necessity and wretchedness, you will ask with all the insistence and ardor that you ought." This is the state of mind that comes easiest as the result of the practice of mental prayer.

This practice, too, leads us,— nay, compels us, to action. From the perception of truth, and our own failures and shortcomings in relation to it; from the clearer understanding of our obligations to God, and God's demands; from an appreciation of God's goodness and mercy, not now as abstract truths, but as seen in our own experience; from the appeal to our loyalty and self-sacrifice which

is perceptible in any view of our Lord's life and work; we draw impulse, energy, enthusiasm, eagerness. We rise from our meditation to meet the duties and opportunities of the day in that resolute and hopeful spirit that is the outcome of the possession of a vividly present faith in ourselves as the fellow-workers with God.

And as, slowly, day by day, with our increasing devotional experience, we penetrate deeper into the inexhaustible meaning of the word *God;* as we catch some little glimpses of what God is himself; as we see him unveiled to us in the work of our Lord; as we learn of his actions in the life of the church and in our own experience; we are drawn to a deeper and purer worship of God, an out-pouring of ourselves in praise and adoration. Surely, if the process that I have been tracing is even approximately true, we cannot fail to be unspeakably profited by the steady practice of mental prayer. And one does not rely only on one's own personal experience when one insists on the immense helpfulness of this practice. One is simply repeating the experience of the saints. *They* tell us that this is the most effective form of prayer. A holy man said: "I always know what the day is going to be from my morning prayer. If it be well made, the day will answer to the beginning; but when it is badly

made, the whole day is out of joint." St. Augustine said: "He knows how to live rightly, who knows how to pray rightly."

Perhaps, with a view to the needs of those who are but beginning the practice of meditation, I may be more explicit as to method. And in the first place, there can be no doubt that the morning is in every way the preferable time. Newly risen, and with our customary morning prayer said, and before the cares and labors of the day have intervened to fill the mind with distracting thoughts, we come with fresh minds and attention as yet unwearied, to place ourselves in the presence of God, to let him bring to us the message that we need for the day that we are soon going out to meet. Later in the day, to be sure, it is possible to make the meditation, but I am sure that all who have experience will tell us that later in the day we have lost something of our power of concentration and receptiveness, that we find it more difficult to withdraw ourselves from the pressure of life and be alone with God. Of course one realises that the early morning is to some a time impossible, and one would not say anything to discourage such from making their meditation later — even in the evening, which is the most difficult time of all. Only one feels the need to warn those who think the morning im-

practicable when really it is not. There are so many difficulties which are really not difficulties of circumstances, but difficulties of thought. Oftentimes the supposed impossibility of the morning meditations can be met by fifteen minutes earlier rising — surely not a very difficult matter for one who is really eager to meet God. But the meditation should not be hurried or distracted, and if the quiet time cannot be secured then, let it be made later.

And as to length: It seems to me that fifteen minutes is an irreducible minimum. If the meditation is to be written it is better that it should be a little longer. But let us say, fifteen minutes of clear time for the meditation — not including the preparation or closing prayer. This time, conscientiously used day by day, is sufficient to insure steady progress in the spiritual life. A wise director has said: "Fifteen minutes a day, rightly used, is sufficient to make a saint."

I am inclined to think that the most difficult form of meditation is meditation upon the text of scripture. Many people I know, read a passage of scripture and then spend some time in thinking it over. This is not meditation in the sense in which I have been discussing it, and if the results which may be expected from meditation follow from this process it is because a great deal

of skill has been previously acquired. A meditation is not just pious dreaming, but severe mental and spiritual work, and I do not believe that many people can take a passage of scripture and by an immediate analysis so present its meaning to their minds as to make a profitable meditation. It is, I am convinced, because they have attempted to meditate in this manner and have obtained no results that so many say that they do not find meditation helpful.

The use of scripture as a basis for meditation requires the previous preparation of an outline of the course of thought that we are to follow; an analysis of the passage we propose to use with the heads of thought and the deduced lessons; otherwise we shall merely lose time in vague imaginings, or find that we have used all our allotted time in getting the subject presented, without really getting to the act of prayer at all. Moreover, it is not everyone who can make a helpful outline of meditations, and for a busy person it is an important item that the time required is more than doubled. By all means, if you can, make your own outlines from the Bible, but of those who ought to practise meditation, only a small per cent have the combined opportunity and ability to do so. To insist on what is no doubt the ideal at the expense of the exclusion of many

souls from a most helpful spiritual discipline is worse than foolish, it is criminal. There are fortunately plenty of books of meditations and outlines of meditations specially prepared to meet the needs of the beginner and the busy person; and it is much better for the beginner and the busy person to use such helps than to be turned away from mental prayer by the fact that they cannot use a more exacting method.

The same sort of advice may be given in regard to another point when too advanced teaching leads to discouragement and failure. It is strongly held by some that mental prayer should dispense with such an aid as writing; that we should learn to concentrate our mind on the subject and follow the development and application by a sustained effort of the attention. Now my experience has brought me into contact with quantities of persons, who, when questioned as to whether they practised meditation, replied that they had tried and failed. The cause of the failure has usually been found to be a lack of a certain kind of mental training, such as enables one to hold the attention fixed upon a given subject for an indefinite time. Such persons had usually been advised not to use outlines, and always advised not to write their meditations. In my opinion that is a vast mistake. Again, it is the

sacrifice of numbers of souls who are seeking spiritual development to an ideal of method. The object of meditation is — not to conform to a certain method, but to exercise the spiritual powers, and method must be adapted to the need of the individual case. I believe that in far the greater number of cases, for a considerable time at least, and until a large measure of experience and facility has been acquired, it is much better to write the meditation. It prevents that vague and hazy dreaming about a subject that spells failure to so many who attempt the practice. To write one's meditation insures a fixety of attention which is not easily gained otherwise, and gives definiteness and precision to thought which would otherwise tend to lose all effectiveness for lack, precisely, of those qualities.

To the beginner who is unused to sustaining intellectual and spiritual effort, I would say then: Get a book of outlines of meditations. You may have to experiment for some time before you find the book that suits your case. Do not be discouraged if the first book you get does not prove helpful; but remember, too, that the lack of helpfulness may be due to your lack of skill, which will be overcome with a little persistence. Then choosing some time, in the morning by preference, and having said your preliminary prayers for guid-

ance of the Holy Spirit, sit down and read over your first point and then write your own thoughts upon it. Do not begin with the feeling that you have got to get through this particular outline in the morning's meditation. Write without thought of what is to follow, and write till you find your mind run dry, and then, and not till then, go on to the next point. If what you have to think of in the first point exhausts your time, stop and take up the outline at that place to-morrow. If you find that you can make nothing out of a point, leave it and go on to the next. And do not believe the books that tell you that the fruitfulness of a meditation depends upon your arriving at some resolution that you are to carry out during the day or the week. No such resolution may naturally result from your morning's meditation. But the meditation is not therefore fruitless. You may well have obtained valuable spiritual guidance and stimulus even though it may not come in the form of a resolution. Meditation is an aid not an end.

It is my experience that many people, while admitting the helpfulness of the practice of meditation, excuse themselves from following it on the ground of the lack of time. When one talks to even very good people of the practices of the spiritual life they often turn out to be ex-

traordinarily occupied. Now, it is well to beware of merely thinking that you have no time; to have time for anything that we really need to do is usually merely a matter of adjustment — a matter of what it is worth while to take in and what exclude from life. If you must economise time, do not do it in your devotions. "If you were a man of business you would not talk in that way," it is said; "a busy business man has no time to make meditations." "If you were a wife and mother," I am sometimes told, "you would understand how impossible it is to get time for meditation." But on the other hand, it was a very busy man who said, "I have a hard day's work before me; I do not see how I can get through with less than two hours of prayer." Can the hard-worked business man, can the wife and mother, get successfully through their day without much prayer? Can life be conducted successfully on the basis of prayerlessness? Is not the weakness of the Christian community to-day precisely its materialism; its attempt — its foolish and profane attempt — to get on with only so much of spiritual practice as will not in any degree interfere with the habits of the business man or the head of a household? Must we not insist that, if we are to be saved as a spiritual community at all, we must find time at whatever

of sacrifice, for more of divine and personal intercourse with God whether it be through meditation or otherwise?

It is a difficult matter to believe in the seriousness and earnestness of people who, out of the twenty-four hours of the day cannot find fifteen minutes for God. Religion cannot have very much value in their experience; they can never have felt its power in life; they have never understood what it means to gain material things and lose the soul. I cannot find time for my prayers means, I cannot find time for my salvation; means, I do not care whether God is in my life or no; there are things that I want more than I want God.

And of course people who do not pray (as distinguished from the routine saying of set prayers) are unfamiliar with the deeper joys of religion. They may very well find spiritual practices a bore; and be facile in excuses that relieve them from the pressure of them. How should one be familiar with God who keeps away from him as much as possible? How should any one know the meaning of religion who has never sacrificed anything for it, but on the contrary, has made it the least interest in life? Think of your own life, what effort do you make to have God a part of it? Have you much religion beyond perfunctory religious practices? You are a very respec-

table person, no doubt, but are you a saint? That is God's will for you — is it not — your sanctification? That is what God is going to ask you at your death — is it not — Are you a saint? Not, have you been a much-occupied business man; not, have you been a hard-worked head of a family; but are you a saint? That is, have you lived in a state of grace — increasing grace?

Think of what life may become just by being brought into contact day by day with God — laid at God's feet, morning by morning, to stand as it were, for a few moments each day in the presence of God, listening to his word to us, and then to go out into the world in the strength of that Presence! We think, perhaps, at times, if it could only be ours to look just for a moment into our Blessed Lord's face, as the Apostles could, and then to go to our work, it would all be so much easier for us. But that is precisely what we can do. We can go as really into our Lord's presence, we can close our eyes and see him with our spirit, we can feel his nearness and be assured of his guidance. And the strength and the joy of it!

THE THIRD MEDITATION

THE THIRD MEDITATION

TEMPTATION

Let us listen to the words of Satan —

LL these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Let us picture —

The wilderness of the temptation. It is a barren and desolate place, a waste of stones and sand overarched by a burning sky. Imagine the loneliness of it, and how it grew more lonely to our Lord as day after day he endured its silence. And then comes the crisis. See those two, face to face; the man gaunt and wearied; the Power of Evil eager, importunate, fascinating. The Man oppressed in his weakness with the painful sense of the weary years of mission that stretched

out before him; Satan presenting rapidly shifting alternatives by which the end of the mission may be attained and the pain of it avoided. And over all, the watching angels!

Consider, first —

That Satan assumes that we want to gratify self and avoid pain, and that therefore if he can show how this may be done we will seize the opportunity, even though in doing so we sacrifice the future to the immediate. Is that true of us — that we will gratify ourselves on any terms? That we will sacrifice our privileges to our comfort?

Consider, second —

That what Satan promises he will perform. "Ye shall be as gods knowing good and evil." And so it was. "The eyes of them both were opened." "All these things will I give thee"; and so he would. If you serve Satan you will get your pay in kingdoms. But of course you must pay your part; it will be at the expense of servitude, with Satan as over-lord. Are you willing to pay the price?

Let us pray, then —

Deliver us from the evil one.

O Christ, save us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Temptation is the means of the more effective discipline of the human soul. And yet we are wont to resent it; we writhe and groan under the repeated assaults of the hosts of evil. Within and without they press about us and upon us. They storm our souls as the enemy storms the beleaguered fortress. They form alliances with traitors within to open the gates of the soul and leave us defenceless. Fascinating visions of immediate enjoyment are spread glittering before us, and all the world seems within our grasp. Turbulent senses seethe until it seems that like an irresistible flood they will sweep away all the barriers principle opposes; and we cry in our perplexity, our distress, our agony — Can this be right? Can God be just and allow all this? God has given me this nature, these appetites — Did he give them to be just a torture?

But there is no other way in which God can test the loyalty of those whom he has endowed with the awful gift of free will. If we are free we must freely choose God; and that implies the

equal opportunity of rejecting and abandoning God. Temptation is the fire that tries; and, as S. Augustine points out, fire has the double effect of softening or hardening according to the nature of the material to which it is applied. The clay is hardened by the fire; the wax is softened. The trial of painful death sent one thief to destruction, the other to Paradise. Out of those who were near our Lord, some were attracted by the beauty of his holiness; but Judas went to his own place.

Life is a sifting process, and the sieve through which God passes us to separate the good wheat from the chaff, is temptation. Or, to change the figure, temptation is the method of the training of the spiritual athlete under which he may break down or as the result of which his powers may develop. We need such testing at every point in our spiritual career: there is no other way of determining character. No one can be sure of an untried strength. Not only are not other people sure of our powers till we have demonstrated their existence, but we are not even ourselves sure of them. Indeed, we might go farther and say that the power does not really exist till it has been called out by the test.

There is so much apparent strength that is only apparent; we believe in it, our friends believe

in it, but God does not believe in it. He assumes nothing till he has tested it. How familiar it is, this break-down of apparent strength, especially in the case of the young. The child that we have been so careful with and who seemed so full of promise and on whom we felt that we could certainly rely and who breaks down, as it were, over night. Every priest is familiar with the people who were most faithful in the parish and who seemed to be acting on strong Christian convictions; or the like people who come to him with glowing letters of recommendation; in either case, and for some seemingly insufficient reason, the religious life collapses. It turns out that what had appeared to be religious principle was merely routine and custom which was unable to stand some ordinary temptation or some change of environment. Other cases one has known which had endured well for a time, but went to pieces when a strong temptation assailed. There are cases in which faith goes down before the touch of personal affliction. We are sometimes able to comfort others in their affliction but when the touch is upon our own lives our religion proves to be an empty shell. We know nothing of an untried strength.

So temptation and failure under it reveal us to ourselves. We find the flaws in our own charac-

ter, we see the weak places and learn the lines upon which we must work. The office of temptation in the moral sphere is like that of pain in the physical sphere: pain is unpleasant, but it reveals the existence of disease. Imagine what a painless disease would be; imagine the horror of knowing that one might be deeply diseased and yet no symptom of it appear. But without temptation we could not at all know whether we were acting on religious principle or no.

And then too, temptation is the mode by which we pass from innocence to virtue. The things are quite different. In the story in the book of Genesis Adam and Eve are innocent, but they are not virtuous. When their innocence is exposed to the trial of temptation they fall. The child is innocent, but in like manner it does not become virtuous till it become old enough to know the difference between good and evil and to choose for itself which it will have. What changes innocence to virtue is the determination of the will. Innocence is a negative state, virtue is a positive state. Temptation gives the opportunity of choice and enables us to pass from the one to the other — from the state in which we were merely without experience of evil to the state in which evil has been met and overcome. The struggle with passion and appetite and desire in temptation fixes

the will and sets the character. I do not know that I will not steal until I have had the opportunity. I do not know that my chastity is a definite spiritual choice until I have been through the fires of awakened lust. I do not know that my liberality is anything more than respect for my social position till I have seized the opportunity to give in secret.

And it is all very severe, very searching as the testing and development of the powers of a spiritual being must needs be. And our falls are frequent and grievous. And therein, in our attitude toward our falls, develops a certain danger. It is humiliating to fall, and we, instead of facing the fact openly, are wont to seek explanation and excuse and justification. We tend to regard ourselves as exceptional and our temptations as peculiar. Under ordinary circumstances — other people's circumstances, no doubt — there would have been no excuse for our act. But the circumstances are not ordinary; we have a weak will and the conditions of the temptation made it exceptionally strong. Our passions, too, are of unusual force; we do not imagine that other people feel that particular temptation in quite the same way that we do. Then we are exceptionally situated and what would be clearly unjustifiable under other circumstances is quite another matter in

ours. There is a certain hereditary element in us that explains the appeal of the temptation to us and makes our yielding to it a less sinful thing.

Well, let us assume that this is not mere pretence, but contains a large element of truth; let us assume that our circumstances are peculiar and that our passions are strong and all the rest of it. What then? It simply comes to this in the end — does it not — that all human beings are not alike? That my weakness is not your weakness, and that the appetite that is weak in me is strong in you. I have my own battles to fight that are determined by my circumstances and you have yours; that is not a very extraordinary discovery. I have a weak will; well, that is no excuse for sin; it merely marks out the battle-ground on which I must fight. I have a hasty temper; well, what am I going to do about it? Set about overcoming my weakness or plead incapacity and surrender?

Sometimes we are overwhelmed with a sense of incapacity. Temptation so besets us; every sense seems an open door through which the tempter finds a ready access to the soul. We are girt about with the forces of evil; we find that in truth the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour. We burn with a sense of sin. But then, remember, that temptation is not sin.

You say, If I were in a proper state, spiritually, I should not be so beset. These thoughts of evil, these impulses to anger and to uncharity; these motions of the sensual nature; these times of rebellion against the restraints of religion would not come. How can my holiest hours be invaded by visions of sin? How can thick swarming thoughts of evil thrust themselves into my very prayers? How, when I honestly wish to give myself to devotion, can my mind be seized upon and carried off to the world? Does not that mean that there is a fundamental sinfulness that delivers me over to the Power of Darkness?

No: not at all. None of these things are by any necessity the result of your willing; they may be, but they need not be. Examine, not your thoughts, but your will. That only is sin that we will in conscious opposition to the will of God. The will is the controlling power in us; examine that. Do you *will* to sin; conscious of the opposition of your thought or act to the mind of God, do you still *will* it?

For remember, back of all the varied forms of temptation there is a person. There is a good deal in modern thought which makes it difficult for us to grasp this in any clear-cut way. Men try to make us shade down the notion of evil into a merely impersonal influence, or even a form of im-

perfection. But so surely as back of all righteousness there is the Person of God, so back of all unrighteousness there is the person of Satan.

We are dealing then with a person and temptation is his work, and therefore independent of us; as the work of a power outside ourselves it becomes formidable only as we give it access to the citadel of our life by willing what Satan wills. So long as we keep our wills true to the will of God we may suffer all the assaults of temptation, but we contract no stain.

But, we think again, we have been suffering these assaults all our lives; we have fought with some seeming success, but the battle is as sore as ever. Does not that indicate plainly enough failure, is not that ground enough for discouragement? Again, no: possibly quite the opposite. Indeed, this constant sense of combat, of having to strive desperately to maintain any ground that we may have attained, may well encourage us. It is quite a mistake to assume that we ought to be in a state of peace. Remember again we are dealing with a person who aims to control us. If we were dealing with an internal tendency we might, to be sure, expect that as we made progress the tendency would weaken. But it is different with a person; our resistance does not weaken him or lead him to give over his assaults. Quite the contrary;

the harder we resist, the more strenuous are like to be his endeavors to break down our resistance. As the state of our spiritual life varies the form of temptation may change, but the fact will remain. Satan finds means to attack even the greatest saints; his hope that ultimately he will find some form of temptation to which they will succumb is indestructible. We see him returning three times to the assault on our blessed Lord himself.

But this I think we should look to, that temptation should become more purely external to us; that is, that there should be found less and less in us to which temptation can appeal; less and less for Satan to lay hold of. His real strength and our real danger is always in the possibility of our coöperation with him.

And then the pain that we feel at temptation, the trouble of soul it causes us, is a hopeful sign. Those who are under the dominion of Satan lie passive in his grasp: they experience no struggle: the sight of sin is no trouble to them. So long as we experience the trouble of temptation, we are free: the slave of sin is passive in his servitude. And perhaps Satan desists from presenting new temptations lest we awake the dull and slumbering conscience.

The struggle never ends because the struggle is

so necessary to us; and not merely necessary to keep our powers exercised, but necessary to keep us humble. We so tend to pride; we never win any little victory but we are delighted with ourselves. If it were not for the constant presence of temptation, the constant humiliation of falls, we should grow insufferably conceited. Even S. Paul needed a thorn in the flesh to balance the greatness of the spiritual gifts that were his. The army that does mere garrison duty and does not all the time expect assault grows languid. It is battle all the time, then; the thing is to know how to marshal our forces so that it may be a hopeful battle.

The ordinary point of view seems to be that in dealing with temptation we must be on the alert to offer direct resistance to each temptation as it arises. That, no doubt, is necessary, but it seems to me unlikely to yield the best results. It is always a make-shift, and leaves us with the same battle to fight the next time the temptation presents itself. We may fight off the same temptation every day and never be much the stronger for it. The only effective method of dealing with temptation is by the strengthening of the spiritual life; we can grow into such a state that temptation will not appeal to us. As our lives become more conformed to the life of our Lord there will be

less in them for temptation to lay hold on. In dealing with an habitual temptation we shall succeed better if we concentrate our attention on the development of the opposite virtue than if we merely try to expel the tendency to sin and leave the soul empty.

Some temptations spring out of circumstances, out of the associations of our lives. Such can be readily anticipated; and we are bound to avoid the circumstances that will expose us to them. We are bound to avoid an association which exposes us to continual temptation even in the case where we have so far resisted and not fallen into sin. We have no right to put ourselves into grave danger of sinning for the pleasure that we derive from anyone's society. For most of us there are certain persons or groups of persons that constitute a constant danger. It may be a danger to our faith because of the opinions that are openly expressed and that we do not know how to deal with. It may be a danger to our morals through the gossip, the impure talk, the general laxity of the conversation that goes on. We know perfectly that it is not good for us to be exposed to such things. We say to ourselves, "We do not join in them"; but if we did not enjoy them we should not find pleasure there. The mere capacity for holding our tongue does not count for very much. And

if we do fall, which we probably do much more than we admit, it is an aggravation of the sin that we have willingly exposed ourselves to the danger of committing it.

Other temptations must be fought by the process of undermining them. Develop, as I said a moment ago, the opposite virtue. If you find in you a tendency to covetousness, give. If you are prone to waste your time or use it selfishly, work for others. If you are inclined to light or silly or gossipy talk, learn to keep silence even at the expense of being thought dull or stupid. Character is positive; and the development of positive qualities is the best method of self-protection. Irreverence is best overcome by cultivating reverence; bad temper by kindliness. Be positive.

There are two wonderful endowments of our nature which uncontrolled are constantly in league with Satan. They are the imagination and the memory. It would perhaps be difficult to overestimate the part that they play in temptation. Take the common sin of temper. We are quick and sensitive, and we think that we have been slighted — we are always thinking that. Perhaps the slight was purely imaginary to start with. Then we proceed to imagine all sorts of things. We imagine what we ought to say and do under the circumstances. We go on to dramatise the situa-

tion. Such and such a thing was said, and we retorted effectively. Then there was another answer and we rejoined — always with brilliancy. How the sense of injury grows by this process. Before we know it we are in a state of emotional tumult that would hardly have been justified had an attack been made on our life. Again, one of the worst sins of imagination is the attribution of motives to others. We rarely know why people act or say what they do, but we think that we are clever enough to infer it. There are people who quite pride themselves on this sort of cleverness. They are usually mistaken; but how much of the friction of life grows out of their assumed cleverness.

Or take the memory — how it holds on to a sense of injury, renewing it day by day. It is apt to crystallise itself into the hypocritical platitude — I can forgive, but I cannot forget. Particularly dangerous is the memory of people with a sinful past. The circumstances, the very sensations, of a past sin are being perpetually reproduced. We awake from some half-dream to realise that we have been living over in memory and imagination a past sin. A state of doubt, of rebellion against God, of uncharity, of impurity, has been accurately reproduced in all its details: there needs but one thing to reproduce the guilt

of the past — consent. A new guilt is contracted, not by the repetition of the act, but by the repetition of the consent. In dealing with temptation there are few enemies so subtle as the undisciplined memory and imagination.

To turn to another phase of our subject. We seem to ourselves to have striven long and faithfully, and with quite inadequate result. Have we striven rightly? That depends. Have you been striving in your own strength or in God's? There is an almost ineradicable tendency to assume that we must first acquire a certain amount of virtue and then come and present ourselves to God as those who have shown themselves worthy that he should help them. If we could only get it rooted in our minds once for all that the sacraments are not rewards of virtue; that they are not intended to be the crowns of Christian conduct, but aids to support feet just beginning to walk! If we can "get good" without the sacraments there would seem to be little meaning or use in them. The proper refuge of the tempted soul is not the weakness of its own will, but the strength of God. The only thing that should keep us from the sacraments is a rebellious will. Failure, which keeps so many away, should only drive us there more frequently. Where should the soul, hard beset by sin, overwhelmed by its weakness, oppressed by

the sense of its own unworthiness seek relief, if not at the feet of Jesus in its confession and in the arms of Jesus at the Altar? "Come unto me," not ye that are strong and victorious, but "all ye that are weary and heavy-laden," is the encouraging invitation of the Lord.

Our hope is in Jesus: and we come to him hopefully because he himself went through our experience. He was tempted in all points like as we are. He is therefore our example — the example of hopeful struggle.

But, you say, how does that example really help? After all, between him and us there is a great gulf fixed. He is God; it was impossible that he should sin. Could he really be tempted?

He was God; but incarnate God. His temptation was a real thing, not a dramatic action. He felt the power of temptation and overcame it by the same means that are open to us. For, consider: The personal suffering of temptation does not come from yielding or the power to yield. It comes from the cry of the awakened appetite or desire. The fact that you resist increases the pain. The temptation that you do not yield to causes you more pain than the one that you give way before. Indeed, the keenness with which we feel temptation is the measure of our resistance. I have an appetite for drink, let us say, or a pas-

sion for gambling: if I yield there is no pain; there is gratification. The pain is in the resistance. In keeping appetite unsatisfied I suffer through the constant presence of the presented opportunity. Let a young man be placed in a position of trust, and then, through circumstances, come to have pressing need of money — it is the day by day resistance that wears on him. Our Lord in the desert suffered the more in that he could not eat without forfeiting his mission.

And then our Lord did not resist sin by the power of his Godhead that could not sin; but with the power of his humanity, by the exertion of his human will strengthened by the action of the Holy Spirit. As the presence of the divine did not counteract the weakness of the flesh, but he issued from his trial weak and fainting; so his human will went through the lonely struggle with the tempter, making use of the grace of God.

And that grace is ours. We enter all our struggles hopefully because we feel that the omnipotence of God is behind us. Nothing can harm us while we hold his hand. No power of the world or of the flesh or of Satan has any strength against the soul that is loyal to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We rest secure in the Everlasting Arms. We walk in the painful footsteps of Jesus; but we walk not alone; Jesus is walking with us.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God. The Holy One of Israel thy Saviour."

THE FOURTH MEDITATION

THE FOURTH MEDITATION

REPENTANCE

Let us listen to the words of the Gospel —

"AND the Lord turned and looked upon Peter . . . and Peter went out and wept bitterly."

Let us picture —

The scene of S. Peter's denial. The house is filled with a curious crowd gathered to witness what seems the end of this fanatical movement of the Galileans. "The authorities have finally acted," we can imagine men saying with satisfaction. They push for place and strain their eyes to see this pretended prophet. They notice from time to time that one of the Galileans has got in, but they are too busy to pay much attention, and

they accept his denials easily. The central figure in this scene we should think sufficiently occupied, in this crisis of his career, with his own troubles. But no, he has time to think of an erring soul. He turns and looks upon Peter, and the look smites like fire. And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Consider, first —

Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. He has kept you all your life, has he not? His is the guiding hand that has led you; his is the voice that restrained. But the world came and offered itself and you took it. People found you in strange places, and said, surprised, "Thou also art one of this Man's disciples"; and you denied, and said, "I know not what thou sayest." Men saw you in unexpected company, and they said, "Surely, thou art a Galilean"; and you denied, not in words, but in conduct; you denied — "I know not the man."

Consider, second —

Jesus has never denied you. He has looked on you again and again. He has looked on you when you were fascinated with the joys of life; looked when you wept amid life's failures and disasters. He has been watching all these years,

it may be, for the door of your heart to swing open to him. Are you going to open it to-day? You think that you have given yourself to him, but you have been keeping back something. Are you going to give it to him to-day? He has been watching for the tears of a sincere repentance. Are you going to shed them to-day? Jesus is looking upon you perchance for the last time. The next time it may be from a throne set in judgment. And those who surround that throne shall look on him whom they pierced.

Let us pray, then —

O Lord, give me sincere repentance. O Lord, give me a broken and a contrite heart.

Almighty and everlasting God, convert our minds, we beseech thee, to deeds that shall be well pleasing in thy sight; that thy rebuke may not prove, by our neglect, a greater cause of punishment, but, by our amendment, a Fatherly admonition; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

. . . . . .

We have perhaps gone on our way through life with little deep thought of its meaning. We have taken it for granted that we were fairly religious people, at least as good as the average. Not saints by any means, we would not claim that; but

we have kept pretty well up with our religious duties, we have been estimable members of the Church; and there has been a silent assumption that there was nothing to worry about.

And then we passed through some crisis, any little thing that God has used for his purposes. It may have been a serious illness, or an accident that befell us, a book that we read or a sermon that we listened to — whatever it was we came out of the experience with a consciousness that was new to us, the consciousness that we were sinners. We have always known that we were sinners, to be sure; we have been saying Sunday after Sunday that we were miserable sinners. But we never attached much meaning to the words. They were there in the Prayer Book and it was quite proper to use them; they were a religious way of speaking, but they never seemed to commit us to much. But now we come out of our crisis with our easy-going self-esteem shattered. A sinner! That means something new; that means a soul out of harmony with God. And God — God is not a formula, God is a living being who holds the strings of my life. God the All-pure, the All-just, I have offended him; him, my Creator, my Redeemer, my Sanctifier. My life is not right in the sight of God. My life which I rather flattered myself upon suddenly appears in a new

light — stained and scarred and defiled. I stand unveiled to myself in the presence of God my judge.

That may be the beginning of repentance. Repentance is a change of mind, however operated; a change of mind born of the perception of the sinfulness of sin. God hates sin. Ah, yes, we know that. But God hates my sin, hates sin in me — that is a different matter.

As life goes on there should grow upon us a deepening sense of God's attitude toward sin. That sense will never grow upon us so long as we seek to found it in our understanding of human life. We shudder, no doubt, at the sins of men. We lay down our paper some morning with the feeling that we have had a new revelation of what humanity is capable of in the way of iniquity. But shudder as we will such contemplation of exceptional wickedness will never give us the right point of view. If we want to know what sin is we must try to look at it through God's eyes.

God's attitude toward sin is expressed in the Cross of Jesus Christ. There, in that wan, exhausted, agonising figure, hanging nailed in the open face of heaven is God's thought about sin. And not about the sin of the world, or sin in gen-

eral, but about your sin. It is a personal matter to each one of us — that dying of the Son of God. Nothing less than that were of any avail to open the kingdom of heaven to any soul. The least sin you ever committed required that.

But if the Cross reveals God's hatred of sin it has also another side: it equally reveals his love for the sinner. The Cross is what God was willing to do in order that you might be saved.

Repentance is born out of the contemplation of the Cross. Let your eyes wander from that and you at once begin to measure yourself by other standards. You begin to think of the opinion of others about sin. Sin is not nice, at least some sins are not nice. But other people seem to be undisturbed by them — good reputable people. Priests live out of the world and get a cloistered estimate of sin; the habit of preaching leads them to over-emphasis. Of course, bad sin — the sins of the lower classes. But just ordinary transgressions such as one can hardly avoid! Just sins of the tongue, or neglects of duty, which everyone except very religious people fall in to, they cannot be so bad. What great harm is there in them?

What great harm? They drove the nails into the Cross of Christ. You are estimating sin by an utterly false standard, the standard of its so-

cial effect. God estimates it by the effect that it has on your soul in your relation to him. The misery of sin is not that it displeases your neighbors, but that it separates your soul from God. The slightest sin tends to do that.

We get then to this question: Do we really care about offending God? Is that the chief concern that we have in our actions quite apart from any other effects of them? Do we fear to offend God? Fear to offend God quite literally, not fear the consequences; for it is necessary to guard against an imperfect or false repentance. Oftentimes what we call repentance is little other than the fear of consequences. We have come to understand that sin has consequences; we fear them or we feel them and they drive us to something that we call repentance; or appalled at the consequences of what we have done we are driven to remorse. That may help towards repentance, but in itself it is quite far from it.

The only adequate ground for repentance is the conviction that through sin we have wounded the love of God. The most complete expression of God in human language is that God is love. God reaches out after us with the yearning love of a Father. By our sin we have wounded that love; by sin we have turned our backs on the Father that seeks us; by sin we have defied and scorned

and insulted that love. To realise that, to feel the heart throb with shame and anguish at the thought of it, to feel the cheek burn and the eyes grow wet at the ingratitude of it — that is repentance. To see the Father turn to us, not with threats and punishment, but with wailing love — that is the real punishment of sin. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" "O my people, what have I done unto thee, wherein have I wearied thee?" "How often would I have gathered thee — and thou wouldst not?" O, the utter shame of having such words come to us from God! What sort of hearts have we that we should deserve this? Shall we not at least free ourselves from any personal application of this to us, if repentance will save us?

What is repentance? Repentance is, in the first stage, sorrow for having wounded the love of God. Sorrow for sin is a deep thing. It is not the facile acknowledgment that we have done wrong, not a languid regret that we are not better than we are, not a nerveless survey of the past that evaporates in a sigh. It is the broken and contrite heart that God does not despise. The note of contrition is reality, a deep conviction of having committed a personal offence. You know how you felt as a child when you had offended your

mother. When, although there were no reproaches, no punishment, you felt the silent presence of something that shut you from her heart. You know there was no joy for you, no rest, till that something was gone; and you know now that all the time the mother's heart was throbbing behind the bar and it was the throbbing love that was drawing you. Well, what you felt then was contrition; and to-day the heart of God is throbbing behind the barrier of sin calling us back to him. There is no force with God. "I will draw them with the cords of a man, with the bands of love."

If we are to feel an adequate contrition we must have adequate self-knowledge. The next step for us to consider, then, is the method of obtaining it — self-examination. We cannot repent of being sinners; there is no reality in that. If we are indeed sinners it is because we have offended God in certain definite ways. We do not repent of sin, but of sins. Our sinful state before God is the result of certain definite acts. We are sinners because we have spoken falsely, or been proud or unkind or whatever it may be. It is hard work, self-knowledge, and easy to shirk. It is much easier to say, I am a sinner, and let it go at that, than it is to say, I am a liar or an uncharitable person. No one really knows himself, and

we are always learning if there be any earnestness in us. It is comparatively easy to know what we have done, but it is the motive that determines the nature of the act and our motives often escape us. We are ready to despair of ever getting at complete self-knowledge. And even in the realm of act we are constantly beset by the temptation to do superficial work, and no superficial work will do. A sin unrepented is a sin unforgiven if the lack of repentance be due to our superficial work. We forget some things unavoidably, but others wilfully. There are dark corners in our souls that we do not willingly look into; there are closed doors behind which we have shut the past which we would fain not open. But to the eye of God darkness and light are both alike; we cannot shut him out. Search deep then into all the hidden things.

And the confession of these sins to God which is the end of this self-examination must be equally particular. We are not forgiven for being sinners, but for having committed certain specific offences. A detailed confession is indispensable. And if we are accustomed to make detailed confessions before our communions, preceded by unusually careful self-examination, it helps greatly to have the habit of daily self-examination. Indeed a careful life will find this practice indispensable.

We can hardly consider that we have brought our repentance to a satisfactory conclusion until we have done what in us lies to undo the past. We can, to be sure, never quite do that; but we can show our will to do it and in some cases make the will effectual. If we have wronged our neighbors we cannot think our repentance very heartfelt unless we are ready to repair any wrong that we have done. Such readiness is indeed a pretty good test of our sincerity. Yet it sometimes involves a pretty hard struggle with self after we had imagined self quite conquered. I suppose that to retract one's words or one's actions to those we have injured is quite one of the hardest things in life. To confess one's ill-doing to God comes much easier. But certainly we cannot have real repentance if we are willing to let a wrong of our doing stand rather than undergo a little humiliation — or a great humiliation, if you like. We cannot be at all sure of our own reality otherwise.

And then there is a certain restitution due to God. Sin, our sin, has robbed God of his glory. He was entitled to be glorified by us before the world. Of course no act of ours can increase the essential glory of God; but there is another glory of God which comes to him through his life as it is reflected in the life of his creatures. The crea-

ture manifests the glory of God. Our obedience and service causes his Name to be praised. We are his servants, and that increase of glory that he is entitled to expect from us as the return for his gifts is lacking if we fail in our service through sin. Have you ever thought very much of sin from that point of view, as robbing God of his due? You squander your energies and the usury that God expected from you is lost. You waste your time, and the progress of God's kingdom halts. Your conduct is unbecoming a Christian, and the respect due to God is diminished in the world.

Are you not bound to make that good? So far as is possible, undoubtedly. You have failed in your prayers and a more zealous devotion ought to mark your life when you realise that. You have sinned through unkindness; shall not the perception of this mean that you will seek out occasions for being kind? You have possibly injured souls by the neglect of prayer and intercession; shall you not show redoubled energy in these practices in the future? Your example has led someone into temptation; surely you owe it to God to try to rescue him or others in the like circumstances. Your words have made religion to be lightly regarded and have discredited God; you must be the more earnest and careful in the fu-

ture. Restoration is not a matter of stolen money merely — that we have not here to do with. There is a more urgent restoration in that it is often the work of years to atone for the sins and neglects of one's youth through which God has been grievously dishonored.

It is no child's play, repentance; and we sometimes weary and grow discouraged. We feel, for example, that our contrition is so imperfect. One often goes away from one's confession feeling how utterly inadequate one's sorrow is. Is a repentance real that we feel no deeper than that? And for our encouragement we need to recall that not feeling but sincerity is the test of repentance. We cannot command a deep emotion whenever we want it. Emotion is partly a matter of temperament and partly of physical condition; these are out of our control. But we can always command a sincere heart and will. I know that I never feel, as it seems natural that I should feel, the baseness and ingratitude of sin. But I can command my will, my understanding: I can confess my baseness and acknowledge before God what I know that I am. And that calm, deliberate self-judgment is surely of greater moment than some momentary wave of feeling which passes over me. Emotion is sometimes desirable to arouse one to one's state; but

we must beware of identifying a fleeting emotional state with that true contrition which is the turning of the will from sin.

Indeed, too much attention is paid to the feelings; dependence on them is almost sure to lead to morbidness. Morbid persons are perpetually concerned about the completeness and sincerity of their confessions. And for the same reason, because applying some false test of the emotions. Again, that is not the test. If you are tempted that way, why, just disregard the emotions altogether. Look to the completeness of your intention: what have you honestly sought to do? Are you honestly bent on the improvement of your life? Morbid people will lament over their failures in feeling when they are very likely quite careless about their failures in obedience. Our Lord's test of love it has to be constantly insisted is not feeling but action. If you love me, keep my commandments.

And again: increasing earnestness in repentance and increasing self-knowledge is apt to bring to light the fact that we are worse than we had supposed. That is quite certainly the case; but so far from being discouraged we ought to be glad at length to have found out the truth about ourselves. We thought that we were quite good people and by consequence were living in a fool's paradise. But

it also brings quite commonly the conviction that we are growing worse, which almost certainly is not the case. What is happening is that we are getting to know ourselves better. Our attention had been at first fixed on the coarser growths of sin; as we cut them away sins are revealed which seem to be new. In reality they had been there all along only we had never before paid any attention to them. What is happening is that we are gaining deeper knowledge of self. That ought not to discourage us; it ought to convince us that we are at last facing the reality about ourselves and have therefore reached a place from which we may hope to move on to permanent improvement. Our conscience finally, under the action of grace, is becoming sensitive.

And it is encouraging at this point to remember that the greatest saints have been the greatest penitents. Just because they know God best they know sin best. The sinner is not troubled about his state; he goes on sinning with a light heart. It is the saint that feels the slightest stain on his soul as an unendurable thing.

And what is the outcome of the life of penitence — for it is a life and not a passing act? We may look for the removal of all that separates us from God. We are tearing down the walls that

sin has erected between our souls and him. Sin has built up strong bulwarks behind which it has entrenched itself; it has secured itself in modes of thought and habits of action. Our lives have got accustomed to its defiances of God. Repentance is the deliberate assault upon all this: a determined effort to clear the soul. We have at length come to have a right valuation of things. We appreciate that our relation to God, the peace between our souls and him, is the greatest thing in life. We seek to remove all that can interfere. And this means increase of grace; a grace that rewards our striving and is God's approving answer to our efforts. God never leaves the soul to struggle alone; he sustains its every effort to reach him. From the depths of our sorrow for sin it may seem that God is very far from us, that clouds and darkness are round about him, that there is a hiding of his power. But it is not so; God is very near the soul striving out of its darkness to come to him. Indeed, that it strives at all is, that all unknown to it, he himself has come out into the tangled wilderness whither it has strayed to seek it. Its painful efforts to recover itself are in reality the drawing of God.

For the love of God for penitents is a very special love. It runs through so many of our Lord's parables, it shines through so many of his acts.

We think of the Prodigal Son whom the father goes out to meet; we think of the Magdalen to whom our Lord appeared first on the resurrection morning; we think of the look searching the soul of S. Peter and bringing the bitter tears; we think of the joy in the presence of the angels of God over the returning sinner; we think, above all, that it was of the very essence of our Lord's mission to seek and to save the lost. Yes, the love of our Lord for penitents is a very wonderful love. With never ending patience he is ever trying to draw us nearer to himself.

And that is the end — to be drawn to him. The end of penitence is peace. Out of the struggle we at length emerge into the peace of God. We rest content and quiet in his arms.

The evening comes, the sun is sunk and gone,
And things lie in stillness and in rest;
And thou, my soul, for thee one rest alone
Remains forever, on the Father's breast.

The wanderer rests at last each wearied limb;
Birds to their nests return from heath and hill;
The sheep are gathered from the pastures dim —
In thee, my God, my restless heart is still.

Lord, gather from the regions dim and far
Desires and thoughts that wandered far from thee;

To home and rest lead on, O Guiding Star,
No other home or rest but God for me.

The daily toil of this worn body done,
The spirit for untiring work is strong;
Still hours of worship and of love begun,
Of blessed vision and eternal song.

In darkness and in silence still and sweet,
With blessed awe my spirit feels thee near;
Within the Holiest, worships at thy feet;
Speak thou, and silence all my soul to hear.

To thee my heart as incense shall arise;
Consumed upon thine altar all my will;
Love, praise and peace, an evening sacrifice,
And in the Lord I rest, and I am still.

THE FIFTH MEDITATION

THE FIFTH MEDITATION

CONFESSION

Let us listen to the words of the Apostle —

"THE Blood of Jesus— cleanseth us from all sin."

Let us try to picture —

The crucifixion of our Lord. See him there on his cross between the two thieves just lifted up above the heads of the hostile crowd. Imagine the awful pain as the strain of the body comes upon those pierced hands and feet. It is well for us, who shrink from the least pain, to realise to the utmost the physical pain of our Lord's crucifixion. And then there was a greater pain, the spiritual pain that came from the evidence of the power of sin as shown in the hostility of those

who were responsible for his death. As he looks down into the hate-contorted faces of the crowd that has followed him out of the city to gloat over his death, the thought of the sway of sin in God's world must have been bitter agony to him. Watch him as he hangs there and try to understand what that agony means. This is the end of the earthly life of incarnate God. Here, amid hostile crowds, amid open enemies, deserted by his disciples, with only a few faithful ones near by, he hangs dying. From each gaping wound the life blood is flowing. Hark! you can hear it falling, drop by drop. That blood is falling for you. The Blood of Jesus cleanseth all sin — cleanseth the whole world, if it will. Has it cleansed you? Are you sure that the Blood of Jesus has washed your soul? Have you received his absolving grace?

Consider, first —

This death that you have been trying to see in its actual circumstances, is a personal attempt of God to save *your* soul. The omniscience of God, means that he has a direct personal relation to everything he has made. It is not that God knows the universe as a whole, but that he has relations with each item of it. It is not that God knows mankind and saves mankind, but that he knows all

men one by one and saves them one by one. God has this sort of relation to you. God has had you in mind from all eternity. When he willed to become incarnate, he had you in mind; when he thought of his death, he thought of it as for you. His incarnation and death was what he was willing to do for you. When he thought of your soul, held fast in the grip of sin, this was what he was willing to do to free it. Do you care as much for your soul as God has shown that he does? He was willing to endure shame for it — are you? He was willing to bear pain for it — are you? He was willing to undergo the deepest humiliation for it — are you? Is it true that you revolt at the pain that comes to you, that you are restless when the practice of your religion demands sacrifice, that you shrink from making your confession because of pride, or dislike of the humiliation of it? What is our Lord doing on the cross? He is the ideal penitent, who was willing to take upon himself the pain and the shame of your sin, and is, before the faces of men, openly suffering for it. He is not ashamed to do this. He is not too proud to do this. Do you shrink from your confession?

The Blood of Jesus can clean you from all sin. Have you been cleansed?

Consider, second —

If you desire to be free from sin, that desire must be strong enough to overcome all the fears that Satan can place before your soul, otherwise it is not a real desire. You must be convinced that restored purity of soul is worth anything that you have to pay for it. You must have a desire for purity that is strong enough to overcome all vicious pride which fears the opinion of others, all shame at the thought of what the thought of others may be of you. Where are you to get this strong desire except from the crucified Jesus? You must be willing, nay, desire, to be crucified with him. As he was willing to humble himself to the death of the Cross, you must be willing to humble yourself, that you, in him, may die unto your sin. It is quite true — is it not — that pride is your root of sin? You want to bear your head high in the world and think well of yourself. Can you really think well of yourself if you are unreconciled to God, if you are resisting the appeal of the Cross, if you shrink from the shame of the Cross, as your crucified master did not shrink? Christ died that we might be forgiven. Have you made that forgiveness yours by any act? Sin is a tremendous fact — how tremendous you can see if you will look up at the dying Son of God.

So tremendous as that! The Dying One is at close grips with it. Sin is a tremendous fact in your life, all the more tremendous, if you do not feel it so. What is the extent of your personal struggle with it? Have you felt it enough to be willing to accept the Cross with all its shame and sacrifice, to get rid of it? The Blood of Jesus, shed in the shameful death of Calvary, cleanseth from all sin. Has it cleansed you?

Let us, then, pray —

O, Lord Jesus, take from me all pride, and grant me grace humbly to seek thy pardon as thou willest.

O, Almighty God, who hath left power in thy Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Thy Son Jesus Christ, grant me faith and repentance to seek thy pardon in the sacrament that thy Son instituted; that there I may obtain pardon and remission of all my sins, through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

. . . . . .

I am going to speak to you of the Sacrament of Penance or Confession. After a pastoral experience of nearly twenty-five years, I feel very strongly the unsatisfactory attitude of the average

member of the Church toward this sacrament, and the need of very plain speaking about it. The present condition of the Church is most unfortunate in this regard. There are some members of the Church who deny absolutely the existence of the Sacrament of Penance, and there are others who seem to me in an even more intolerable position, who, while admitting the doctrine of the Sacrament, act as though it did not exist. One understands the denial as resting on an imperfect understanding of the Christian religion; one fails to understand the neglect. Does that rest on an inadequate sense of the sinfulness of sin? This state of things causes great distress to those who take their Bibles and Prayer Books literally and seriously. Especially it causes great distress to those priests, who, overwhelmed as they are by the sense of the greatness of their responsibility toward God for the souls he has committed to their pastoral care, are struggling to make the Gospel of Salvation known in its fullness and completeness as the one means to the attainment of that sanctity which is the medium of the vision of God.

We need, too, in the Anglican Church, to get rid of a certain romanticism that clings about the practice of confession. People treat it as though it were a romantic act to be surrounded with an atmosphere of mystery. They speak of it with

bated breath as a daring spiritual adventure; or they conceal the fact that they make their confession as though some shadow of disgrace hung about it. They whisper about it in corners, and want appointments at odd hours as though they were participating in some disgraceful intrigue. But why not treat confession naturally and openly as a sacrament of the Church? Naturally, one does not speak much about one's sacraments, but one makes one's communion in a perfectly natural and open way, and if it occurs to one to mention it one feels no hesitation or shame or need of concealment; why not treat confession in the same way? Such natural treatment of confession will do much to clear the intellectual atmosphere that surrounds it. It is just a sacrament, as Baptism and Confirmation, and the Holy Communion are sacraments.

In speaking of this matter to members of the Anglican Church I feel that it will prevent misunderstanding, and will much simplify treatment, if I assume three things and state them as assumed. I assume then:

1. That our Lord Jesus Christ committed to his Church, and specifically to the priesthood, as representing and embodying his own sole and eternal priesthood, the power to remit sins under such conditions as the Church itself should lay down.

2. That the Church of which we are members, intends, and has explicitly made known its intention, that its priests shall exercise this power.

In support of this last position, I will simply quote two passages from the Book of Common Prayer.

(a) "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands; whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the word of God, and of his holy sacraments."

(b) "Almighty God . . . hath given power and commandment to his Ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins."

I understand the Church to be entirely serious in these statements. I understand that when, at the most solemn moment of my life, the bishop laid his hands upon me and pronounced the words just quoted from the ordinal, the Church meant precisely what it put into the mouth of the bishop to say. It intended me to understand those words in their natural sense and not to put some far-fetched interpretation upon them. Rather, it intended that I should interpret them in the

light of their history and to understand by the forgiveness of sins what Catholic Christendom has always understood. I understand that when the Church directs me, in the recitation of the Daily Offices to say to the people committed by her to my spiritual care, that Almighty God has given power and commandment to me, his minister, to declare and pronounce to them, his people, the absolution and remission of their sins, under certain conditions, the Church means to be understood in the ordinary sense of English words. It is conceivable that the Church may be wrong; it is inconceivable, that under such circumstances and solemn conditions, she does not mean what she says. If the Church means to say that her priests have not power or commission to forgive sins, she has certainly chosen very strange words in which to convey the fact. She has chosen words that for centuries in the formulas of the Church have meant one thing to convey the opposite thing. That, of course, is inconceivable — the mind of the Church is plain.

It may, of course, be said, that, granted the existence of the *power* of absolution, it does not of necessity follow that its *exercise* is to be found in the Sacrament of Penance. It does not indeed follow that the exclusive exercise is to be found there; but to deny that its usual exercise

is to be found there is to deny the whole history and practice of historic Christianity. As I am not speaking to those who are likely to make such denial, I will leave this side of the question.

It is, then, the privilege of all baptized persons to make confession of their sins to God in the presence of a priest, and, if penitent, to receive from God, through his representative, the remission of their sins. This would seem to be a privilege that everyone should be eager to avail himself of. And yet we know that it is not. It remains always one of the incomprehensible things about the membership of the Church, the thing which perhaps more than any other makes it difficult to believe, that those things which if they really mean what they profess to mean, are not so much obligations as privileges of unspeakable wonder, are precisely the things that a large proportion of the membership of the Church use in a very perfunctory and occasional manner. When one considers what we say that we mean by the Holy Communion one would expect the Altars of the Church to be thronged with those seeking to be fed and strengthened by the Body and Blood of Christ. When we consider what we say we believe to be the horror and disaster of sin, and the blessings of the pardoned soul, one would think that the demand for absolution would

be constant and imperative. And yet, how few face the matter of confession at all, and of those who do, how few rise above the conception of an unpleasant duty?

In urging the practice of confession upon adults, one is quite commonly met with an attitude of indifference, rather than active opposition; an attitude which may be summed up in this way: "All you say may be true enough, but I have got along pretty well so far, and I do not see why I should change my practice."

Why should one who has never been to confession and has "got along pretty well," go to confession?

The answer seems plain enough. So far as I know it is the only definite means instituted by our Lord for the forgiveness of sin. This seems a difficult saying? Well, do you know of any other means? I am of course talking of sin after baptism.

There are to be sure plenty of promises in Holy Scripture addressed to the penitent sinner assuring him that his sin can be forgiven; there are plenty of assurances, in general terms of God's willingness to forgive. But when I bring those promises into relation to my own need; when I ask, "How will God forgive me, a sinner; how am I to obtain the assurance that I am forgiven";

what answer do I find? Do I find any other answer than that of the Prayer Book that Almighty God hath given power and commandment to his ministers to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins? Personally, I do not think that my sins have been forgiven because I have spent a longer or shorter time thinking about God's promises, any more than I think that I am or should be clothed and fed if I were to sit down and think about God's general promise to care for all his children. Of all general promises, whether of care, of guidance, of forgiveness, we have to seek the special means through which the thing promised is to be actually acquired. Our Lord promises in that wonderful discourse in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, to feed us with himself; but when we ask how this is to be effected, the Church points us to the definite act of the Holy Communion. God calls all men to repentance and belief in him, but when we ask how is the heathen who has heard this Gospel Summons to make his repentance and faith effective in the acquirement of a Christian character, we are directed to the definite act of Baptism. No one, in the Church at any rate, proposes to set aside the Sacrament of Baptism as the means of incorporation into the Body of

Christ and of the forgiveness of sins, on the ground that there are to be found in Holy Scripture many passages which promise these things without any mention of baptism, and that, indeed, the mention of baptism in the Gospels is not frequent. God's general promises of the freedom and efficiency of Grace, and his exhortations in general terms to receive grace, have never for a moment been imagined to make the reception of the means of grace unnecessary; on the contrary, it is precisely in the means of Grace that the Church has thought to find the meaning and application of the general promises. Otherwise, why should God have established any means of grace at all? The general promises are interpreted by the institutions and applied through them. The Christian religion was preached as the way of Salvation; and when men, convinced by the preaching, asked, "what shall I do to make my belief effective, what shall I do to be saved," the answer invariably was, "Repent and be baptised." I am utterly at a loss to understand why we should think all this is to be completely changed when we come to deal with mortal sin committed after baptism. The situation would seem to be unchanged. You have a sinner who hears the general promises of God to pity and pardon him, and who finds those general promises

interpreted and applied through the Sacrament of Penance. Should we expect, knowing this, that they would for us be applied in some extra-sacramental fashion? We certainly should not say to the heathen: — if you are yourself satisfied with your repentance and are content to rely on the general promises of God, you may safely ignore baptism, which the Christian Church has always believed to be the method of the personal application of those promises.

There is of course no desire or attempt on the part of the Church to set limits to the pardoning grace of God. The Church is merely teaching the meaning of the revelation that she has received. What may be God's action outside of his revelation we do not attempt to determine, neither has the Church taught that sacramental confession is necessary with the necessity of salvation in all cases. The Church has not taught that confession is necessary in the case of venial sin for the obvious reason that it defines venial sin to be such sin as does not destroy that relation of the soul to God that was established at baptism; not being out of the "State of Salvation" as the Catechism calls it, in which we were placed at and by baptism, there is no absolute need of a sacramental re-integration of that state. The Church has not even ventured to say that in the

case of a mortal sin the sacrament of penance is *absolutely* necessary; on the contrary, we are taught that if we make an act of perfect penitence, of perfect faith and love — forgiveness follows. Only the limitation suggests itself; if we know of the Sacrament of Penance established as the normal means for the forgiveness of post-baptismal sin, *and decline to use it,* have we any right to think our act of faith and love complete? Such acts of faith and love in a perfect act of penitence must be held, in the Church at least, and by instructed churchmen, not as a possible alternative of the Sacrament of Penance, but as a refuge when we cannot obtain, or obtain at once, sacramental absolution. We cannot conceive that our Lord has instituted an unnecessary sacrament, or one that under the circumstances of its application, we can use or not, as we choose. Let it be that we can be forgiven in response to a perfect act of contrition; but are we entitled to think very highly of our contrition if we make it the excuse for our neglect of the ordinance of God?

But, it is said, the Church itself only bids me go to a priest when I am unable to quiet my own conscience. I should suppose that one might quiet one's own conscience, that is, make a satisfactory act of contrition, if one were very sure

that one's sins were only venial sins, that is sins that left one still in a state of salvation and therefore in union with God. The sin that so disturbs the conscience that one cannot of oneself quiet it, is mortal sin. In that case the sacrament and application of the Blood of Christ is needful. If it is objected that as a matter of fact consciences do get quieted without the use of the sacrament, one can only say that there are more ways than one of quieting them. Again; have we a right to quiet consciences if we ignore these divine methods?

In any case we are more sure, indeed we are only sure, of the completeness of our repentance when we have done all that we can to show our sorrow. And does not "all we can" include the Sacrament of Penance? I am concerned in a most serious matter — the forgiveness of my sin. Shall I ask, "What are the easiest terms on which I can be forgiven"? Shall I bargain and chaffer with my God about my salvation? I want forgiveness for my sin, and if I feel that a *real want* the most I can do is all too little.

But — the objection comes from another direction — but in such matters as forgiveness I feel that I want to deal with God directly; at such times the child needs to come frankly to the

father, and I want nothing between my soul and God.

If you consider a sacrament as something between your soul and God all the answer that I have to make is that *God placed it there.* For myself, a sacrament is not something placed between my soul and God any more than (to use a homely illustration) a piece of bread is something placed between my hunger and its appeasement. Sacraments are not obstacles keeping us from God, but divinely appointed means of access to God. On your premises, the very incarnation of God himself whereby he takes our nature in order that he may lay hold of us and bring us into union with God is an obstacle! And moreover is there not a little unreality about this difficulty? You do not feel it anywhere else. You do not advance it in the case of baptism, which, like penance, is a sacramental forgiveness of sin. You do not plead then that the child should come to its father without the intervention of a priest. You do not advance it in confirmation and say that in your opinion, you shall receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit because you ask them of your Father, and that you do not need or want the intervention of a bishop between your soul and God. You do not advance

it in the Holy Communion, and say that the strengthening and refreshing of your soul shall be the outcome of seeking the Father without the intervention of a priest. When you or your friends are ill, you do not say, let them pray to their Father themselves. We want no prayers of the Church or any human intervention. Why, then, do you say these things in the special case of the forgiveness of post-baptismal sin? Is there not a certain unreality in such objections?

There are those who say, "on the whole, I admit and believe what you say about the necessity of confession and absolution, only I do not follow you when you imply that absolution is to be obtained, or perhaps I should say, only obtained, after private confession. The Church in the public services provides a general confession, and follows it by an absolution. As that is the provision of the Church, it must be quite sufficient." It must indeed be quite sufficient *for the purposes for which it is intended.* But what the Church intends to do is not at all to convey a sacramental absolution. The General Confession in the Prayer Book is not a confession of sins with a view to absolution, but an acknowledgment of sinfulness in general terms, and is in the nature of an act of contrition. The absolutions which follow the general confessions are not absolutions

in the sense of acts conveying forgiveness, but what are known as ritual absolutions. They are solemn prayers for forgiveness such as are used, and have constantly been used by laymen — such as are used, for instance, by the priests and servers in their preparation to celebrate the Holy Communion.

No: We must face the fact squarely; if we are declining the use of sacramental confession we are simply trusting to the adequacy of a repentance which shrinks from the pain and humiliation involved in forgiveness in the special way our Lord has appointed. Do not confuse the issue. What I have been stating above has always been the formal teaching of the Church as witnessed by its official documents. We do not care to accept as a substitute for that formal teaching the words of private teachers or the example of times of laxity. What we need to look to for our guidance is not the example of lax or indifferent or wordly and uninstructed people, but the teaching of the Church and the practice of the Saints.

In my experience as a priest of the Anglican Church the people who are drawn to the use of confession are of two kinds. There are those who have sinned much and have come to feel the fruitlessness and the oppression of sin. Their resort to confession is born out of their great and

sore need. Without hesitation, without interposing fruitless objections, just because they need to be rid of sin, they come to lay their sins at the feet of Jesus and receive his gift of pardon and peace. Their sins, which are many, are forgiven because their resort to Jesus is so whole-hearted, so trustful, so self-condemning. The other kind of men and women who use the sacrament of penance habitually are those who love much. They have not many sins, but because they love our Blessed Lord so much the few sins they have are to them as great ones because they measure all sin in terms of the Divine Love, which all sin offends. They come to Jesus in the fulness of a great love and long to pour out their hearts to him and to receive the assurance of his pardon. But there are other men and women — and they are the hardest to deal with — who have no depth of experience on one side or the other, who have not come to feel the need of God in any pressing way. Until they feel the need they will hardly resort to this sacrament.

There are other persons, a large class, whose failure to resort to this sacrament for the forgiveness of their sins is due, not so much to doubt or prejudice, as to the fact that the truth has never been adequately presented to them. They have not thought about the matter. If they have

heard of confession it has been as a Roman practice or as a "High Church" imitation. It has not occurred to them to ask whether it might not possibly be more than that — a means of grace for their own souls. When they do so question the matter, when they find in confession a means of grace used by the universal Church and find in themselves the great need of just this grace, they come humbly and gladly to our Lord in his sacrament and there find rest for their souls.

There are other people, who, without any experience of their own, or seeking any, are influenced by the talk and prejudices of others. There has been, and is, a vast amount of talk against confession. But talk by whom? Talk by people who have never been to confession for the most part. I do not know that in any other department of human knowledge the words of the ignorant are held to outweigh the word of the experienced. The testimony in favor of confession comes from those who regularly practice it. If you do not go to confession and want testimony in regard to it, find someone who goes regularly and ask them for their experience.

We hear much of the danger of going to confession. The danger of acquiring a formal religion; the danger of undue priestly influence, and so on. I suppose we have only to open our

eyes a little upon the fact of the religious life of America to see at least this much; that the practice of confession is at any rate not the sole cause of formalism and exaggerated clerical influence. A formal person is formal under any religious environment, and perhaps the best way of finding one's fault and getting rid of it, is contact with an experienced confessor. And as to undue clerical influence, it is exerted much more in those quiet confidential talks which people who do not go to confession like to have with their pastor, "who is so sympathetic"— than in the confessional. People with the sort of character that needs to lean on somebody, will find somebody to lean on; and they will not lean less hard on a clergyman who denounces confession than on one who practises it. There are no doubt dangers in the practice of confession as there are dangers in the practice of any conceivable thing in which human beings are concerned, from eating and drinking up. But it seems to me that the members of the Anglican Communion have been so thoroughly instructed during the past three centuries in the dangers attendant upon the practice of confession that we can afford to drop that side of the subject for a while and insist for the present on the at least equal dangers of neglecting the

practice — the dangers of inadequate repentance and of despising the institution of Christ.

But finally there is this last stronghold of laxity, "Yes, all you say is certainly true. But confession should be an occasional thing, lest we grow to depend upon it too much. After all, it is a medicine, not a food." Quite true, and you might go on to say; "we only take medicine when we are ill." That would complete your illustrations, would it not? Quite true, I would not for a moment think of advising anyone to go to confession *who has no sin on his conscience.* If you have not sinned since you last made your confession, do not go. If you can keep out of sin till the end of your life do not go. Quite true: Confession should be an occasional thing, the only occasion for it is sin. Quite true: Confession is a medicine, and the only excuse for taking it is that you are ill, that is, have sinned,— that is all quite plain. We seem to be in complete agreement.

But I am ready to go even further than you appear to want to go. I should not advise anyone to go to confession as often as they sin. Sin is not, in my experience, a rare and infrequent thing, but a very common thing. But I do not therefore advise a use of confession as frequent as

sin. Rather I would advise a *regular* use of confession, just as I would advise a regular use of the Holy Communion. Confession should not be occasional in the sense of irregular. Just how frequent it should be is a thing to be determined by the needs of an individual. But it should be regular and systematic because, in the first place, all religious practices that are to have a normal and healthy effect need to be regular and systematic, and, in the second place, because the function of confession is not merely the immediate cleaning of the soul but the reformation of the life by the up-rooting of habits of sin, and the in-planting and training of habits of holiness.

For — and this is commonly lost sight of — the regular practice of confession has benefits outside of and in addition to the fact of forgiveness. It solidifies the practice of self-examination and leads to a clearer self-knowledge. It is wonderful how a few months' practice of confession clarifies the spiritual understanding and effects an adequate self-knowledge — a self-knowledge which is the absolutely indispensable prerequisite to the improvement of character. It produces a careful and a watchful life. One is continually surprised, in first confessions, at the complete ignorance of intelligent men and women of the meaning and bearing of their daily acts.

And this forgiveness is not all that we obtain in this sacrament. Because confession is a sacrament it confers sanctifying grace. It heals the wounds of the soul and restores, in case of mortal sin, the union with God that we have lost. I think we fail to dwell sufficiently on this healing and strengthening side of the sacrament. It cannot be insisted upon too much. In this lies the meaning of regular confession and the confession of venial sins. Our souls are strengthened and refreshed for the spiritual combat whenever we receive absolving grace. We are thereby forwarded in the progress of our sanctification.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it seems to me that members of the Anglican Communion should realise how great a responsibility the Church laid upon them, when at the Reformation it ceased to impose confession by authority, and left it as a privilege which the individual must appreciate for himself. We need to realise how completely the Church has thrust the responsibility upon the individual for accepting and using, or rejecting this sacrament.

It is no light responsibility, and anyone rejecting the use of the divinely established means for the forgiveness of sins should act in the full sense of the responsibility.

For myself, I like to look on this, and all

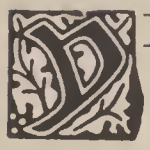
other sacraments, as manifestations of the divine love for souls. I like to see here one more path by which our Lord is seeking to lead the soul to him. How wonderful is the seeking love of our Lord — the love that will not be discouraged or overcome by the obstacles that our sins interpose between it and our soul's only good. We do not find ourselves altogether able to abstain from sin, but we find in ourselves a growing abstinence and a growing hatred of sin. We find a growing longing for purity. These two longings, the longing of our souls for purity, and the longing of our Lord to purify us, meet here in the Sacrament of Penance, where our souls attain what they long for when he washes away our sins in his most precious blood, and fills us with the grace of his indwelling Presence and sanctifies us to himself. Is there any joy like the joy of the forgiven soul?

SIXTH MEDITATION

SIXTH MEDITATION

RELATION TO OTHERS

Let us listen to the words of our Lord —

 E are the salt of the earth."

Try to picture to yourself —

The most Christian person you have ever known. Among other things that you recall about this person is this: he was a great power for Christ; wherever he went he was felt as a distinct and positive influence for good. You recall that people depended upon him for sympathy; they opened their hearts to him, they sought his advice; they trusted him. And yet he never put himself forward, never seemed in the least degree to seek

power. Ask youself? What was the secret of his influence? He was the most Christian person I have ever known.

Consider, first —

That it is the function of the Christian to reflect the power of Christ, the life of Christ. The lake reflects the sun, but only partially; so our lives reflect back something of the Christ who has influenced them. The amount of our Christian influence is proportionate to the degree in which we have been influenced. To have no positive Christian influence is to have been uninfluenced. Our business in the world is to influence the world for Christ. Salt saves other things. It is a source of power.

Consider, second —

All your life you have been taking in. When you were a child you were regenerated and made God's child by adoption and grace. You were taught all the articles of the Christian Faith. You have had all the privileges of Christian Worship and Christian Sacraments. All the gifts of the Incarnation have been yours. What for? Just that you might be a sponge? Have you ever felt the obligation of possession? Much will be required from those to whom much has been given.

Much has been given you — all the riches of the Kingdom of God. What have you rendered back?

Pray, then —

That you may recognise your responsibility to the Kingdom of God. Pray that you may be filled with zeal for the rule of Christ in this world. Pray that you may understand the power of personal influence.

O blessed Lord Jesus, help me to use the grace Thou hast given, and pardon my misuse of it in the past.

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by Thee be plenteously rewarded: Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

. . . . . .

Our Lord does not contemplate the members of His Kingdom living apart, without contact with the world. Some may do so for a time, or for special purposes, or as the result of a special vocation. But the vocation of most men and women is to live in close and intimate contact with all those influences which flow from the social organisation, to share in the hopes and struggles of their community, to influence and be influenced by daily

contact with other lives. And at the same time our Lord does expect that there will be a clearly perceptible difference between the members of his Kingdom and those other human beings who are not so related to him. "Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed": "Ye are the salt of the earth": "Ye are the light of the world": There is something about the Christian which differentiates him from the society of which he is a member.

This implies an attitude that is not very easy to keep, a plant of life not easy to live up to. What it demands of us is really the power to live in the midst of a society, many of the motives of which are not Christian, and whose acts are often indifferent or hostile to Christianity, and still maintain without wavering our own principles. This implies a great power of control, and steadiness of mind and will, a power to stand alone if need be; in short, a strength of character which is not altogether common. It is much easier to "withdraw from the world": to stand aside from the mixed interests of our fellows; to hold aloof from things "secular," and pursue our Christian vocation as much as may be in congenial surroundings and in congenial society. But this would not appear to be the fulfillment of a Christian's vocation at all. "Ye are the salt of the earth"; an ele-

ment that must be mixed with human society in order to its purification.

What is implied, therefore, is not simply a passive power of resistance in virtue of which we may manage to keep ourselves clean and pure in the midst of a world that does not care over much for cleanliness and purity, but an aggressive and militant power as well. It will not do just to hold on to our religion. That is a very common mistake of well meaning Christians. Their religion to them is a very sacred thing which they hide in the privacy of their own lives. In the midst of hostile influences and possibly open attacks on Christian faith and morals, they bear themselves silently, without protest or witness. Their Christianity is to be inferred from their abstentions rather than from their activities. I do not mean, of course, that we are always to be ostentatiously testifying; but still, with whatever necessary avoidances, we have a mission of witness — we are missionaries. It is our duty to make plain to the world the power that the Gospel is to us. People are constantly saying: I do not see any difference between those who profess Christianity and many who do not. The man who frankly accepts this world as the final fact so far as human knowledge can tell him, is not less kind, is not less possessed of the helpful virtues,

is not a less valuable member of human society, and, indeed, in your Christian vocabulary, is not more worldly, and more devoted to material gains and material pleasures, than those who are the members of churches. What a reproach! Is this the true presentation of Christian society? Do you recognise yourself in the picture? Is it true that you are living in the same way, desiring the same things, working for the same ends, as the man who "makes no profession"?

We are not solitaires; we live in a world of other beings like ourselves, and our lives touch their lives. And out of this touch of life upon life are born duties. God would have it so; and the answer to the Cain-cry, "Am I my brother's keeper" is just, yes. You are your brother's keeper to the extent and in the degree of your possible influence upon him for good or for evil. You cannot set an example of evil before your fellows, and say: Well, if he falls that is his fault; I exercised no compulsion; he has a free will as well as I. You cannot live a life that contents itself with low ideals and say: It is not my fault if society is not better than it is, I do my duty. You cannot turn your back on opportunities of helpfulness and say: Well, it is not my business. Can I not do what I will with my own? No; plainly not. You have no own; all that you have

is God-given trust for the use of which you must ultimately give account.

Duty is born out of the mere fact of contact. Sympathy is not something that we owe to our friends. It is an obligation to all life about us. It is in the first place an obligation to make an effort to understand others. There is so much of the trouble of life that is directly traceable to our failure to understand one another. How often do we attempt to approach the lives of others with a sympathetic touch. Is it not rather true that in our approach to others we permit ourselves to take dislikes, to be influenced by prejudices? Those first impressions that we sometimes pride ourselves on as being evidences of our insight into character, how apt they are to be mistaken. It is very rarely that we can judge of another from first impressions with any likelihood of being just. The giving way to first impression, and allowing ourselves to be influenced by peculiarities of manner, or the passing words of a first conversation, too often erects a wall between us and those whose lives we might have influenced for good, or who might have been a good influence in our lives had we given time to the patient understanding of them. Antagonisms and alienations grow up where friendship and helpfulness might have been. Where lives have different backgrounds of social

circumstance and education there is usually some effort required to effect a mutual understanding. We each speak our own dialect, and do not easily understand one who speaks in another. We tend to regard our social and religious and intellectual habits and customs as the norm to which others must conform. We decline to make the effort which is necessary to see that other habits and customs have, perhaps, as good a right to exist as our own. So we get antagonistic, and there was no need of it; we only needed to be a little patient.

And then that other sympathy which is the highest of human ministries one sometimes thinks; that power that we cannot analyse but can feel so keenly, which the old word *fellow-feel* expresses so well. What a wonderful endowment of our nature that is which gives us the power of soothing and consolation and enables us to stand by suffering and grief and make it more tolerable. It is a power that lies not in any word that we say, but just in the fellow-feeling which makes itself known without words. Surely there is no ministry that we need to be more watchful of than this, because it gives us such power of helpfulness in our relation to others. It is such a simple ministry too, so easily fulfilled. But do we really grasp at the opportunities that come to us? Do we feel a

Christian obligation in the matter of sympathy? Again, it is not an obligation to those whom we love. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?"

It is the duty of the Christian to undertake the ministry of sympathy whenever there is an opportunity to exercise it, even to the evil and unthankworthy. This is his office because he is the minister and representative of Jesus, whose life was spent in sympathetic ministry. And the Christian is at such an advantage. He has consolation to offer in every case. There are many cases before which the unbeliever must remain dumb. But he who can offer the Gospel of Jesus need never be dumb.

The wonderful thing about this power is that we all have it; not all in the same degree perhaps; but none of us is so lacking in this endowment as to be incapacitated for the ministry of sympathy. The dumb feeling is in our hearts, but we may not have accustomed ourselves to utterance. We can easily give ourselves the needful training if we will. We do not need to wait for the accidents of life to make demands upon our sympathies, but may ourselves find the opportunities for their exercise. It is well to have one or two lives to which we systematically minister. An old or ill

person whom we regularly visit, a poor person into whose dreary life we bring a little warmth and brightness, a child whom we keep in constant touch with and guide as we may. Life is full of such opportunities of helpfulness the fulfillment of which requires very little of time or money, yet which enable us to increase the value of our lives to others, and, if that were the thing to consider, are in their reaction upon our own character, of unmeasured significance.

And then, to take a thought we touched upon a while ago, the responsibility for example in a narrow sense. I fancy that few people realise the power they are daily exercising. Whenever life touches life,— and the contacts are almost momently,— there is influence. The word, the glance, the gesture, conveys an impression of us to another. Those first impressions, which, as I said above, ought not to be trusted to, and which yet do influence so many — how often they are the result of some quite trifling act or word. A man is set down as a cynic, or a superficial trifler or an irreverent person, as the result of some act or word which very likely does not represent him at all. We leave people with an utterly false impression of our religion often, as the result of some careless remark by which we meant nothing. A certain guard over the lips is important to the

Christian, a certain recollectedness of speech and action.

And if this is true, where there is no bad intention back of acts and thoughts, how much more does example count where it becomes distinctly bad. We recognise this plainly enough in the extreme case. It is easy to see the pernicious results of the example of a bad boy or man, easy to trace the track of ruin that he leaves behind him. But there are unnumbered ways of showing a distinctly bad example and using the life to work evil without going to the extreme. There is the father whom nothing ever suits; whose evening return from business is followed by complaints and disagreeable criticisms. He never sees why just that dinner is provided, or why the children have been permitted to do this or not made to do the other. Business has not gone very well that day, and the irritation occasioned by his lack of success is permitted to expend itself in making the home miserable. Naturally the children get out of the polluted atmosphere as soon as possible, perhaps to the more cheerful life of the street, and after a while the man wonders that they have gone bad. Did he not do all he could, provide a good home for them, and so on? Then there is the wife who is always complaining. The man gets back from business and finds himself in

an atmosphere of the kitchen, or of petty social squabbles. The children, again, are a fertile source of complaint. Or there is the family in which petty personalities, the faults of others and their peculiarities, are the staple of conversation. There is a continual running fire of carping criticism and gossip. There is the Sunday lunch after the father and mother have returned from church. One wonders just what impression of religion the children get then. In many cases it must be an impression of their priest as a very no account fellow who always does and says the wrong things. The general atmosphere of an American Sunday morning household, with its slothfulness, its up-set of usual habits, its hurried mother, its lounging father, its pervading tone of the Sunday newspaper, is quite enough to make atheists of any unfortunate children that dwell therein. The family lies at the very root of religion and social order, and the average American family (I do not know anything about others), with its neglect of the ordinary Christian obligations for merely frivolous reasons, its lack of prayer, its treatment of religion as a mere matter of taste, its intermittent church going, its utter lack of any spirit of reverence or discipline, is about the worst example of the perversion of a holy thing that one will anywhere find.

Society is possible at all only as the result of a certain amount of sacrifice of our individual liberty. The friction of life grows precisely out of our disinclination to sacrifice for others and our demands that they shall sacrifice for us. Anyone who is thoughtful of his possible influence on other lives will not be careful to stand on his individual right, will not adopt an attitude of continually warning off intruders upon his preserves, but will be quite willing upon occasion to waive the strict letter of his rights in order to have easier and freer intercourse with his fellows. Life is a process of give and take, and we have to learn to compromise with it; that is, we are not to expect to find that principles will always be worked out to their logical conclusions by those who hold them, or that those who are keenest in their assertion of their individual right will be equally keen in their recognition of the rights of others; but, discounting the certain failure in such respects, adjust our lives, not to the theory, but to the actual practice as we shall find it. There is much of the secret of peaceful living in knowing when to give way, and when it is not worth while to assert oneself. There are times, no doubt, when in the interests of peace itself we are bound to stand for right, even our own right, and for principle. But in daily intercourse right and

principle are, in the long run, best served by a certain mobility which enables us to adjust ourselves quickly to varying circumstances. We shall perhaps best attain this by looking to the rights of others rather than to our own rights, by taking into consideration their time, their habits of thought, their convenience. In the family, for example, it is easy to overlook such considerations; to assert one's own will and convenience in a manner that is little short of brutal. Because we have power to do a thing is no reason at all for doing it. In social life outside the family there is a certain pressure of good manners which restrains us from this kind of self-assertion; we do not dare be rude. But in the case of those with whom we are on familiar terms this pressure is removed. Many a girl who is honey-sweet in society is most difficult in the home. The man whom you met at dinner last night and who talked so delightfully, and was so considerate, turns out, if you see him in his own family, a mere tyrant riding rough-shod over all the rights of his wife and children. There are houses where one finds it extremely disagreeable to visit because of the perpetual family jars, the atmosphere of criticism and fault-finding, into which one is plunged.

There are people who strike one as quite unfitted for the ordinary intercourse of life, people for

whom there ought to be provided some sort of a sanitarium with trained specialists to teach the art of human intercourse. There seems to be no reason why men and women should be the slaves of egotism and evil tempers to the extent they are. I suppose there is nothing that people who are at all careful realise more keenly than their defects of temper, but they rarely show much zeal in the matter of self-correction. There really is no reason whatever for allowing one's temper to get the upper hand of one. It is perfectly possible for any sane human being of adult years to control himself at least outwardly. If one cannot, one is insane. There is no need of going to pieces nervously and disturbing the household or the office and putting everyone else in a state of nervous strain. The proof of the statement is that we do not do it unless we feel that we can do it with impunity. The man who rages about an office and swears at his employees manages to hold himself in under much more provoking circumstances at a meeting of a board of directors; just as a child who will cry, and howl, and kick the furniture in the home will not think of doing anything of the kind in the schoolroom. We can always manage self-control when we feel strongly enough that self-control is to our own interest. It is not necessary to waste much sympathy on people with uncon-

trolled tempers. What they need is discipline.

It is, I repeat, easy to gain external self-control aided as we are continually by social pressure. But it is quite another thing to gain internal control when the only pressure is the pressure of principle. External control enables us to get on with people up to a certain point; but nothing but internal control enables us to get on with ourselves or with God. Neither, whatever may be our habit of external control, can we be quite sure that we are safe from an explosion of temper unless we have ourselves well in hand within. Restraint, after all, is only negative. What we need to assure our safety in this matter is the virtue of peaceableness. The crust of the earth is covered with flowers, but within are fires.

This danger of explosions when the control we have of ourselves is only external and negative is well illustrated from the habit of internal brooding over slights or wrongs, real or fancied. There are temperaments with a morbid tendency which are continually on the look-out for injuries of one kind or another. Other people are objects of suspicion to them, enemies who may make their hostility felt at any moment, and the probability is that they will not make their enmity felt by overt action of any sort, but in some stealthy and subtle way; they will insinuate an injury by some covert

word, some carefully calculated shade of meaning, some partially concealed allusion, some veiled look. Such persons go back over an apparently innocent conversation and extract from it, in the retrospect, hidden and insidious meanings. They are the sort of person, whom, if you do not happen to notice them in a crowded street, are sure you intended to cut them. They twist the most innocent remarks till they reveal hidden insults. The best that can be said of them is that they are diseased and unhappy and therefore deserve consideration and pity. But that is not what they need to say to themselves. They need to recognise such imaginings as morbid phenomena which need to be taken sharply in hand and rooted out. They need to put a very severe check upon themselves and not for one moment heed or tolerate their diseased temper.

It is not much better in cases where there is actually a basis in fact for temper to take hold of; when there has actually been a slight or injury of some sort. If there is anything to be done about it, it had better be done in the way of a frank talk with the person who is guilty of the injury. Nothing will ever be gained by brooding over it except self-disturbance. Yet this sort of self-disturbance precisely seems to be a kind of perverted joy to the morbid temperament, which is

fertile in the art of dramatisation. The situation is reviewed internally with appropriate phrasing: "She said this and then I retorted that, to which she replied so and so, and I said crushingly." This is not what actually did happen, but what ideally ought to have happened. Gradually an insignificant incident grows, under dramatic treatment, into a tragedy; but the tragedy is not in the incident itself, but in the wreck of charity in a diseased soul.

Let it be that people are difficult to get along with; no doubt they are — there are all sorts of disagreeable people in the world — unreasonable people, rude people, uncharitable people, and all that. But just because they are in the world I have to manage to get on with them. I cannot go away and live in a cave, and I cannot entirely adjust my life and its duties so that I shall meet only congenial people. I have to get on with all sorts of men and women; and there is one thing that has always been a great help to me in this distress, — and that is the thought that all these people have to get on with me. I fancy that I have a good many corners that hurt when you run into them, and thorns that prick when you lay hold of them — and yet, I get on. Let me then make allowances for the corners and thorns of other lives.

It is injured self-love that is at the bottom of

the matter. In the last analysis, the reason we complain is that we are not treated on the level of our own estimate of our deserts, and we are pained to think that our self-estimate is not that of the world at large; or we do not get our own way, and we are irritated at the balking of our will. It helps sometimes to inject a little humor into the situation, and to see the really amusing figure we should make were we really what our words and actions imply that we should like to be, the center of a group of admiring people who take us seriously in terms of our self-esteem. Really the salt of criticism and the friction of life upon life is a very healthy thing and prevents the growth of an exaggerated egotism.

A very serious and far-reaching moral principle is involved in our relation to others; what moralists call the principle of scandal. Scandal, in morals, does not mean loose talk of an uncharitable kind about other people, but it means actions of such a nature as shall lead others into sin. S. Paul's advice not to eat meat offered to an idol if there was anyone present who thought it wrong, or who would be led by the example of another to eat and thus violate his own conscience, is an illustration of scandal. To induce by one's example a person to play games on Sunday who was convinced that such acts are wrong would be scandal.

You see at once how careful one needs to be lest one's conduct scandalise others. I do not mean that we are on all occasions obliged to yield to other people's prejudices, or that we may not try to convince them if we think them wrong, but only that we are not to lead them to do what is against their conscience. We say, in our rough way, this thing is either right or wrong; if it is right I may do it, if wrong, I may not do it. But not at all. That is the sort of morals that could only be practiced in a social vacuum. But we do not happen to live in a social vacuum. We are members of a society where life touches and influences life constantly; and morals must involve not only the estimate of the moral nature of an act in itself, but an appreciation of its effect on others. And beside being social beings we are Christians, and as such bound by the obligations of charity. The law of charity will not permit us to lead a brother into what is sin for him, even though it is not sin for us. We are members of the body of Christ and have obligations toward all other members. Our obligation is one of edification and development. We are the salt of the earth with the function of preserving others. There are times, no doubt, when it is within our right and even may be a duty to assert our Christian liberty. But self-assertion is always a dangerous thing, and

our ordinary obligation is not self-assertion but self-sacrifice. It is our undoubted duty to forego our liberty rather than to injure others. To go to the limit of allowed self-indulgence can only very rarely be a duty. Our ordinary duty is to strengthen our brethren. We ordinarily solve difficult questions of conduct by approaching them positively; by asking, not what may I do, but what must I do. Life gets the proper orientation when we conceive ourselves as Christians with an obligation to reveal God to others; that is, to show to others how far we have succeeded in reproducing the life of Christ in ourselves. As members of the Christian Church we are intrusted with its good name,— which ought to be felt as a much deeper obligation than it usually is. It cannot be denied that the laxity of Christians inflicts more injury on the Church than all the assaults of unbelievers. Indeed, the assaults of unbelief find their chief support precisely in the laxity of Christians.

It is worth while to insist upon this danger of laxity. The Christian ideal is the highest conceivable ideal of life. Anyone who tries to live up to it can hardly help feeling a certain moral and spiritual strain. It is not the ideal of the society in which we live, and we are therefore conscious and ought to be conscious of a certain sep-

aration from that society. But we find it hard to keep this attitude, we find it difficult to submit to the social inconveniences that are involved in it. Others are asking us, perhaps we are asking ourselves: — Why be quite so strict? Religion is no doubt a good and necessary thing, but is it necessary to have so strict a religion? There are plenty of people who "are as good as you are," who are quite as esteemed members of the Church, who do not maintain this standard that you are trying to live up to. Surely, if you will study the lives of the members of the Christian Church, you will see that they manage to maintain the esteem of the Christian community, and at the same time adjust themselves to life under modern conditions with much less friction than you do.

We have all, I suppose, felt the stress of this argument and have, perhaps, at times dropped our standard in response to its seeming force. But the essence of the argument is,— is it not — that while we ought to be religious, we do not need to have a religion which is constantly interfering with and checking our desires? We must recognise with all frankness that we live in a society that is not Christian — of which neither the ends nor the means are chosen with any reference to Christian principles. What we have been taught are Christian ends and aims are scoffed at as

Mediævalism or Puritanism. Much of the membership of the church has no doubt gone over to this point of view. Members of the Church do not keep Friday as a day of abstinence. Sunday is being rapidly turned into a day of amusement. Are we to stand out for the customs of a by-gone age?

Now, no doubt, it involves a certain inconvenience to have a religion that is constantly interfering with desired action. But it is precisely the point of religion — is it not — that it does so interfere; that it does involve self-limitations, and a certain separation from others? What sort of an abortive performance is a religion that never interferes? Religion ought to interfere and ought to interfere much more than it does in the life of the average church member to-day. Things such as I have touched upon are gross and open scandals in the life of the Christian community. They earn for that community the well merited reproach of worldliness. Earnest people are shocked and the work of the Church is hindered; and such laxity, one is sorry to think, is especially prevalent among those who call themselves Catholics; who appear to think that severity of life is a Protestant invention and that their repudiation of Protestantism may be known by the imitation of Roman laxity. There is need of a very stern call to strictness of life.

The world, both religious and secular, is just now spending so much of its breath in calling us to be liberal that we have come to think it the last disgrace to incur the reproach of illiberality. Liberality is, no doubt, a very good thing. But when the word liberality becomes a mere piece of current slang, we need not pay much attention to it. As things stand at present, liberality seems merely the synonym for the abandonment of obligation. It is well to be liberal with the things that belong to us; but the Religion of Jesus Christ, is ours only as a trust, and to change its truths and scorn its obligations, and violate its principles is not liberality but betrayal of trust. And less than any liberality does the feeble and timid liberality of Churchmen appeal to one. The world laughs at the liberality which consists in tampering with sacred obligations, while still trying to hold on to the appearance of churchmanship. If we do not respect our religion no one else will.

There is another matter that seems to me to need to be touched upon, though when I have touched upon it I have found it rather a sore subject. I mean the matter of social relationship, of the choosing of companions and friends. I have found, a little to my surprise, that people resent being told that religion has or can have anything to say in such matters. Yet it ought to be clear

that the companionships of our lives are one of the chief formative influences that have been brought to bear on us. I should find it utterly impossible to estimate the influence upon my life of such self-chosen friendships. People who care very much for their children are careful of their associations before all things. One of the strong arguments against public schools is that they expose children to undesirable companionship. Does the danger of an evil or the power of the good companionship cease as we grow older? I hear the impatient voice that says, we have to live in the world as it is. Truly, but in the matter of close relation with people, in the choosing of friends, we do actually make a selection, and the point that I wish to make is that this selection should be governed by principle, and that the principle should be that of possible mutual influence for good. We know all sorts of people; we are intimate with very few. Shall not the intimacies of a Christian be of a special kind? Narrow? Well, if you like; I am not much more afraid of being thought narrow than of being thought illiberal. The fact is that I know, and you know, of, possibly, many cases, in which faith was made ship-wreck and the moral life gone to ruin just through the influence of badly chosen companions. I have on my desk at present a letter from a young

woman who was, some years ago, under my direction, who tells me that I will probably not be pleased to learn that "she has given up creeds." Why? Not in the least because as the result of prolonged study she has come to the conclusion that creeds have no obligations or place in modern religious life; but just simply because she has been living with a lax set of people, who talk the ordinary liberal slang about creeds. There are multitudes of such cases to-day, and there are other multitudes who "have given up morals." The influence of friendship and the importance of the choice of friends cannot be overrated, and it is absurd to say that Christian principles have nothing to do with so important a choice.

One of the great powers of character is the power to stand alone. One feels sure that many of the failures of the moral and spiritual life are due to the lack of that power — the ability to stand out against criticism, against the silent pressure of example, against the constant pull of our social environment. If therefore one has got into a social environment that is unsympathetic with one's aims and ideals, one finds one's position by no means easy or pleasant. Unless one has great determination of character one is almost certain to be spiritually debilitated by the unwholesome atmosphere in which one lives. Most people have

little determination and are quickly responsive to the nearest influence. Society is filled with people of no moral stamina; people who mean well and want, on the whole, to serve God, but who actually do not effectively serve him but are given over to the world. They are moral jelly-fish ready to take any shape that the society they find themselves in demands. They gradually lapse from the Christian standard of the Will of God to the worldly standard of what other people do. The pity of it is that they so rarely understand what they have done. They consider that occasional compliance with the externals of religion is the equivalent of a Christian life and a Christian service.

When the obligations of discipleship are pressed home upon us with any force, and it is pointed out how necessary it is that we should guard our influence and example, it is one of our temptations to say: All that may be true as a general statement of the case, but there are surely individual exceptions. It would be presumptuous for me to apply such reasoning to my own life because it would attribute to me an importance that I do not possesss. I occupy no influential position. I am not of any importance at all. Do you really believe that? Or rather is it not the assumption of an apparent humility for the pur-

pose of escaping the pressure of obligation? How would you feel if one were to take your professions at their face value? If, for instance, I were to come in and say: Of course I know that you are a person of no importance, and it does not matter at all what line you take in this matter, but still it would be a favor to me if you were to do so and so? Would you like it? It is perfectly true of most of us that we might not be of much importance elsewhere in life; but just where we are (if we have not utterly missed God's will) there God has placed us, and this must be of importance. Your life has some special significance in relation to the Kingdom of God. It has the significance of an appointed service. You are not to measure the importance of life by any social standard or position, but by God's will as made known in your circumstances. If what God gives you to do is the darning of stockings or the washing of dishes, it is of much more importance that you do that well, than that you dream of being a great philanthropist. The influence of a girl just out of school, in her family, in society, in the church, is not very large, is not the influence of a mature woman of wide social and religious experience; but is just as important for the girl that it be watched, and that all her work be done as under

the eye of God with a deep sense of responsibility to him.

There is always a grave danger of despising the opportunities of service and of influences that are really ours and of neglecting them for the sake of undertaking something more showy. At the present day certain kinds of social work are making strong appeals, and it is quite the thing to take part in them. I would not for a moment think of criticising them, or suggesting that their importance is over-rated. I am concerned with another question. It is one of the problems of modern parish life to find workers who will consecrate themselves to the often dull routine of parochial activities. It is my experience that a great deal of the energy which belongs normally to the parish is drawn off to work which is not at any rate more useful, but is more popular and more fashionable. One needs to be very clear where one's obligation lies, not where one's inclination calls one; whether one is following a vocation or a taste. When I asked the sisters in charge of a certain mission house why they did not have staying with them and helping them the class of people who were associated with a social settlement not far away, they told me that they could not get them because they required steadiness and disci-

pline of their helpers. In other words, their insistence upon religion as the basis of their work stood in the way of its popularity. This is what people usually mean when they complain of the narrowness of church work.

If you find yourself longing for wider influence and broader and more stimulating work, if you find your life limited and commonplace, it is a good test to ask yourself whether what you are really looking for is harder work; work that makes more demands upon your energy, your time, your sympathy; work that offers and requires more discipline; or whether you are simply restless, or want to do the work that can be talked about and gives you a sense of being connected with a popular thing. What God will require of us is an account of what he gives us. "We are not required to make our own lives, but to make the most of whatever life is ours."

And to make it *now*. Influence is always a present thing. It is *to-day* that you have to account for. "Ye are the salt of the earth." Are you?

THE SEVENTH MEDITATION

THE SEVENTH MEDITATION

WORK

Let us listen to the words of our Lord —

"I MUST work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work."

Let us picture —

Our Incarnate Lord ministering to man. He is talking to the people who gather about him in some village street. His gracious words suggest to some poor soul which has been in despair the possibility of help. Some disease long despaired of, may perhaps be healed. Some sin, long hidden, may be confessed and pardoned. Some need of another whom one loves may be brought to Jesus and satisfied. The thought is acted on, the

need is brought to Jesus, and help is found. Think of the multitudes that our Lord thus helped of which there is no record in the Gospel. Daily our Lord was thus ministering.

Consider, first —

This is the work of him that sent him. He has a mission for this work; that he does it is one of the proofs that the Father sent him. But this work of God — the need of doing it — did not cease with the Ascension. It was handed on to the Church to do. It is now your work. By virtue of your baptism you have been made a member of the Body of Christ and a sharer in all its work. Each one of us takes up an allotted work in an allotted time; and then, time passes, the night cometh. Think of the night of death settling down slowly, silently, inevitably over your work. *The night cometh.* When the morning breaks it will be the judgment morning, when God shall judge every man according to his works. *Is your work ready for the judgment?*

Consider, second —

Life is given us as opportunity for work. God does not thrust work upon us in such wise that we have to act. That is not God's way. But he gives opportunity. The opportunities that are be-

fore even the narrowest life are practically boundless. Each day presents them. Every life our lives touch offers them.

Let us pray, then —

That we may see life's opportunities and realise them as calls of God. O God, open thou mine eyes. Let us pray that we may be more intent on God and less on self. That we may not be blinded by self-interest. Let us pray that we may see life as service.

The night cometh —

O Almighty Lord, and Everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern, both our heart and bodies, in the ways of thy laws and in the works of thy commandments; that, through thy most mighty protection both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

. . . . . .

It happens to a man to come into a fortune, a man who, perhaps, heretofore has been in narrow circumstances. Whatever else the unexpected fortune may mean to him, it at any rate means opportunity. What will he do with it? He may just squander it in unwise financial operations or in idle dissipation. He may, by a more careful

selfishness, still devote it to himself. Or, he may take a broader view of his responsibilities and devote it to philanthropical work, to the erection of large charitable foundations and the like. Or he may consecrate it to work that is directly religious. It will be evident that the farther he gets away from himself in the use of it the better.

At some time we have all come into the possession of our fortune — life. That is, we have come to realise that we are in the possession of a power of wonderful possibilities. We may have passed a good part of our existence without thinking at all about this, but the day comes when we do find it out. That is the day of our inheritance. The understanding gradually grows upon us, or comes suddenly; no matter, it comes. Life, a wonderful, God-given gift is ours.

And the same question arises as in the case of material fortune. What are we going to do with it? And the same lines of use are open. We can use it for self, for others, or for God. Life may be deliberately or carelessly thrown away in what seems the highest enjoyment of it, as we are seeking to extract from it the choicest sorts of self-gratification. It may be expended in noble effort to relieve the suffering of the world and to enlighten its ignorance, or it may be devoted with passionate self-sacrifice to the work of God.

I suppose we may define work as the expenditure of the energies of life. What we have to judge of is the nature of the expenditure. For what do we think it worth while to exchange our energy?

We are not so much concerned to discuss generally life and its opportunities, as just one of them — work. But let us be clear, for all rests on this primary assumption, that our business in this world is God's glory and our salvation — our salvation through God's glory. The proper motto of every life is "The greater glory of God." Through my life God is being glorified. Back of everything we undertake, because back of the whole of life, is the thought — *the Glory of God.*

Work gets its impulse from God and not man. There is where we part company with the humanitarian. He holds that the sight of human misery and human need is in itself sufficient to inspire our efforts on behalf of others. But while one would not deny or belittle humanitarian efforts in any degree, or underestimate the immense amount of good they accomplish, still, one must insist that the humanitarian theory is insufficient. One is convinced that if it were ever to become the sole motive for good works, good works would largely vanish. At present humanitarianism is supported not by its own theory of itself, but by

the reflex action of Christian ideals. Centuries of training have produced in the mind of nations subject to the influence of Christianity certain convictions as to the obligations we owe to our neighbors in the way of helpfulness and sympathy. For a time it is possible for individuals to abandon the Christian dogmas upon which such convictions ultimately rest and retain the convictions themselves. But only for a time. The living without Christian beliefs will at length necessitate the development of ideals which are in accord with whatever beliefs we are actually basing our lives upon. An unchristian society will develop a social and utilitarian morality based on materialism, and from the point of view of such a morality it will be socially advisable to deal with problems of suffering by the elimination of the sufferer. I do not see how it will be possible from the point of view of materialistic morality, to take any ground other than that the criminal, the insane, the incurable, will be better put out of their misery and society will be improved if relieved of the burden of their support and the danger of their propagation. Such a "scientific morality" is indeed well over the intellectual horizon. There is no firm ground for our present attitude towards our suffering brethren except that they are *brethren;* the children of the same father, the redeemed of

the same Saviour, the sharers with us of the same hope of immortality. The work that we undertake for man is not really work for man; that is, it is not work for man for man's sake, because he is a suffering animal like ourselves; but it is work for man for God's sake, because we have received from God the command to love and cherish our brethren.

The humanitarian example of our Lord is very easy to overstress. Jesus of Nazareth going about doing good is a marvelously attractive figure, but is very far from being an adequate account of the work and aim of the Incarnate Son of God. The ultimate account of his mission is that we may have *life;* that through union with him we may be made partakers of the divine nature,— a union which involves all that we mean by salvation from sin and death. In the prosecution of this his incarnate work he showed the loving character of God in his contact with human lives. He healed and pardoned. But no one who has studied the gospel carefully would for a moment infer that such activity was of the essence of his mission. Rather it is, as has been said, a by-product of that mission. And it remains a by-product and not the essence of Christianity. The Christian church is not a benevolent society. It is the Body of Christ intent on the edification of

that body in holiness and perfectness of living. Benevolence is an inseparable accident of its life, as it is the common life of a brotherhood.

That is, I do not care for man as a superior kind of animal with a material and mortal life. I do not find man, from that point of view, very interesting. No doubt there are people who do care for man considered from that point of view and are willing to minister to his material wants and found hospitals for the relief of his sufferings; just as there are other people who are tremendously interested in cats and puppy-dogs, and leave fortunes to erect hospitals for them. But such are oddities of the strange human race. In the long run, however, any sustained and widely effective work for man must rest, not on love of man as man, but love of him as the child of God; that is, it is ultimately resolvable into the love of God. God has revealed his love for man — for sinners and sufferers, and I, a sinner and a sufferer, have experienced that love. I want to pass on my experience and bring men to the knowledge of that love that they too may experience it. More than that, as a member of the Body of Christ, I am commissioned to carry on the work of the Incarnate. My work for man is, like his, the externalisation of the love of God; the contin-

uation of the work of making God known to the world.

If, therefore, my work ceases to have any outlook towards God, if it ceases to derive its own operation from his love, it ceases, by that very fact to be a religious work. It may still be in a limited way a useful work; the work of a man who does not believe in God has still its social usefulness; he may endow education and research, build hospitals, found libraries, and so on. But a Christian is bound to take other than social ends into account. He does not believe that you can permanently advance humanity in the world now, if you leave out of your account the spiritual nature. Therefore the Christian is bound to see to it that his work is Christian work. It is bound to aim beyond the ideal of material comfort, which at present is the exclusive aim of so much work for men, to the permanent enrichment of man's spiritual nature. It is sad to see so much of the activity of Christians — I cannot say Christian activity — going to the up-building of institutions that make no provision for the spiritual needs of those whom they are intended to benefit. It is sad to see so many "church" schools and colleges and general institutions, in which the provision for religion is merely routine and nom-

inal, and where the great work of conversion is neglected.

God has willed that his work in this world shall be carried on through men. Men are brought to salvation through human energy. Whether the child is brought up to be a Christian or no depends on the human beings to whom it is committed; whether it knows and practises its Christian obligations depends upon those who have the charge of its education. Whether the Kingdom of God grows in the world, whether the heathen are converted, all this is in human hands. We dwell frequently enough on the fact of our dependence upon God — often times with a backthought of excusing our lack of effectiveness by God's lack of activity. But do we ever understand the way in which God depends upon us? That the failure which we think of as the failure of God is in reality our failure. We some times question the slowness of God's work, and say, How long, O Lord, how long? But is not the questioning rightly, the other way; How long, O man, how long? There has never been any lack of divine power or of divine will. What has been lacking has been human will and coöperation. The reason that the world is not converted, the reason that you are not converted, if so be you are

not, is not that God has not willed it, but that you have not willed it.

Let us get clear, then, that what we are called to in this life is God's work. It is very futile to say, I have not time. You have not time for anything else. Your time is God's time. Let us get the right emphasis. Religion is not an avocation, a taste to be gratified if we can afford it, an ornament to a life that has time and means for such luxuries; religion, the service of God, the realising of the life of union, is the very meaning of our existence, the thing that makes us not to be beasts; and all else is by-product. You have not time for anything else. Imagine yourself standing, as finally you must stand, before the judgment seat of God, in the midst of a vanishing world, and saying, I had no time to give to your service. You have all the time there is; are you using it with a sense of the urgency of your Christian vocation, with a sense of the coming night?

For most people the matter of time is a matter of order and forethought. We waste so much time because of the lack of any order or rule in its expenditure. How many minutes go by in the day and we doing nothing. There are no doubt many people in this world whose whole day is crowded. I am not unmindful of them,

and the modification of religious problems that their circumstances necessitate. Their lives are not any the less bound to be religious lives, and I will have a word to say to them after a little. The life that I am speaking to now is a life which is capable of religious activity in another sense and in other ways than those. Not a life under greater obligations, but under changed obligations of expression. Lives into which much of religious activity can come and needs must come if they are to meet the thought of God for them.

This presentation of the obligations of Christian work will not seem hard or strange to us, if our work has indeed that impulse that I have spoken of. As an obligation pressed on an unwilling life it may indeed seem hard; but if we have understood, in some dim way, that Christian work is the externalisation of the love of God, the setting of that love free to act in this world, we shall surely try to rise to the level of our responsibilities. Of course it is impossible to struggle on in an unselfish work when one's only motive is self. But if there rest in us the consciousness of being servants, of being called of God and sent forth in his name, endued with his strength, work is not only possible, it is joyful.

For there will rest on us the awe of a great

commission, the feeling that lies back of the Apostle's cry — Woe is me if I preach not the gospel. That will call out in us the eager offering of self, the readiness to spend and be spent in the service of him who gave himself for us, and now looks to us to bring his work to its perfect conclusion.

How life is dignified when we thus regard it. Your life has perhaps seemed narrow and useless. You have looked over its confined borders and asked yourself; what is there that I can do? You have felt yourself held in the grip of circumstance, of toil, of poverty, of suffering, and longed to be free of these things that you might make your life one of greater usefulness. The chance of any helpfulness coming from you to other lives has seemed so very slight, you have so limited an opportunity of usefulness that it seems negligible. And you have sighed: O, if I were elsewhere, under other circumstances!

Such thoughts, natural as they are, omit the fact, do they not? that God has given you just this life that you know. You have not stumbled into it by accident. And therefore, whatever service God may or can expect of you is a service under your conditions. He did not call you to be a pioneer missionary, or the founder of some great religious institution, and consequently does

not expect this of you, nor are you to dream of it. God is asking you the service of your life just as and where it is. There are men, no doubt, whom God calls to give largely, to work strenuously, but that is not your vocation. What perhaps he asks of you is to spend a little time in visiting the sick, an hour in the work of Guild or Sunday School. It may be not even so much of what we look on as "work" as this. It may be to raise your soul to him in intercessions as you lie there in weakness and what you call helplessness, though you may be, who knows how helpful, through your prayers. It may be that what he wants is keener appreciation of the meaning of Christian example and teaching to the life of the child he has given you. The apparent size of the service is not of much importance, but not to miss the very service God meant for us is of the last importance. You perhaps are losing the opportunity God sends while lamenting the opportunity he does not send. Remember the man with one talent. Do not despise what belongs to you. It is a very easy form of charity to give away the millions of other people. If one had all the money that people would give if only they were able — if they had so and so's fortune, one would be able to support all the works of the Church. Unfortunately such liberality does not help. The

work of the Church is helped more by the dollar you could give, and do not, than by the millions you would give, and cannot.

Do not imagine that the only work that has reference to God is so-called religious work. Every activity of our lives is capable of religious expression. We are not called to bring certain parts of our lives to God, but our whole lives. Herein lies the answer to that large class of persons whose time is fully occupied with the unnecessary toil that our present wretched social organisation imposes upon them. It is not that there are many who cannot take part in the organised activities of the Church. But religious activity, the responsibility to God for service, does not begin and end with such activities. Even such pressed lives if they will, can make time for a good deal of earnest prayer. There are constant opportunities of helpfulness and sympathy in the very midst of the hardest work. And then a spirit of service can be put into all work. The shop, the office, the school, the household, are God's, and the servant of God can show that he understands that, and lives by that ideal, by the way in which he does his work. There is no unsanctified work which is the work of a sanctified person.

Let us try to get a higher point of view, let us

approach work from the point of view of sacrifice. Sacrifice means, in the last analysis, the offering of oneself. All work, therefore, acquires a sacrificial character in proportion, as through it we are offering ourselves to God. And we may look on our work — may we not — as a sacrifice of thanksgiving? We think what it means to us that we are the children of God; and perhaps it is better if we try to make it more personal and think what is contained in the fact that I am the child of God and that for me the Lord Jesus died and rose from the dead; that to me he is even now giving abundant blessings. As I dwell upon his love and all that that love has meant and does presently mean in my life, the impulse of gratitude and love arises, and I ask myself; what can I do that shall in any degree show my appreciation of my Saviour's love; that shall shadow forth however dimly my feeling for Him,— which shall test for me the reality of my love and gratitude?

Work is the way, is it not? Work — the offering back to God the energy that he has given; the direction of that energy into ways that are pleasing to him. God has given you the power of speech. Cannot you sanctify that gift by bearing the message of the Gospel to some soul still apart from God? Are there not those to

whom you can tell the sweetness of that love which you have yourself experienced? God has given you, perhaps, the gift of teaching — are you exercising it? He has given the power of sympathy, are you making it felt? Some special gift of God we can each discern in our lives which he has given us as the matter of sacrifice and which we can offer back to him.

It is the conviction that we are continually associated with the work of God — that we are working for and with him — that carries us over the difficulties of work, and through the times of discouragement. We shall often find that those for whom we work are ungrateful. It is one of the things that those who are just beginning religious work find most disheartening. When once we got to work, we expected that our work would be accepted with gratitude. But not at all, human nature reveals its pettiness and its selfishness in its crudest form to the religious worker. One discovers that in this case, when one thought that one was laying a true foundation for spiritual influence one has been regarded all along as a source of supplies, that, by a little ingenuity, could be made available for an indefinite time. In that other case, what was really present was not a desire for guidance and instruction, but a hope of money or money's worth. It is easy for the

inexperienced worker to fall into a mood of cynical reaction and disillusionment. Or the difficulty comes from another side. One has spent thought, and time, and energy, and withdrawn attention from things which one would most like to do, one has put oneself to expense and inconvenience, and then some chance word is misinterpreted, some foolish gossip is listened to, and the work one was building up is irreparably injured, and all goes for nothing. Our ideals are shattered and we ask, what good?

It is, on the whole, good to have such experiences — good, as they send us back to our self-examination to ask ourselves just what we were attempting and expecting. If our work is merely a work for men; if our capacity to continue in it depends upon the return we shall get from men; if consciousness of success and the pleasant glow of being appreciated is essential to us; why, then, we shall, and may as well, soon throw up the attempt. All that means that one is working for a human and earthly reward, just as much as though we expected so many dollars a week and are disappointed at not being paid. But if the love of Jesus and eagerness to serve him is at the bottom of our activity, it is quite another matter and we shall not bother about the praise of men. "We have taken a standard" reported the young

officer to his general, with a pleasant anticipation of the praise he would doubtless receive. "Go and take another," was the only answer. It is human enough, but it is radically wrong to expect to be praised all the time for doing what ostensibly one is doing for the Glory of God.

It is apt to seem to us, too, that the returns of our work are pitifully small. We start in upon some active religious work, and after a little we begin making up the account. How much has actually been accomplished? One fears that this often has its roots in the feeling that we are being judged by others on the basis of what we can show. Others have a certain standard of efficiency by which they judge us, and we fear to fall short of that standard. We may feel that commercialism is being brought into our work, but we have not the courage to stand out. I do not mean that one should be content with being obviously inefficient, but only that commercial standards of numbers and percentages are not any true standard for a spiritual work. Yet it is difficult for a priest, for example, who knows that his Bishop is estimating his work by the size of his Confirmation class, and that his vestry is estimating him for his power as a money getter, to disregard deliberately their standard of value — to decline to pad his Confirmation class with

unprepared material, or to desert his spiritual duties to become a public beggar. It is difficult to hold oneself to purely spiritual ideals, in the face of an ever-increasing pressure from commercial ideals; to tell oneself, and to stick to the fact after it is told, that one's business is purely and simply to serve God with all one's heart and soul and strength, and that success in that is the only success, that the only test is the loyalty of service. Of course, one may, with all honesty and zeal of service, have undertaken a work which one cannot carry on, for which one's powers do not fit one. It may turn out that one was not fitted to teach though one honestly thought one was, or that the special guild we undertook we could not manage. Well, that is a matter for readjustment which, once made, we perhaps find our proper work. But even in such cases the test is not a commercial one — does it pay? but the feeling of bad adjustment and lack of vocation for the special work.

After all, how is it possible for us to tell what is or what is not success? We can only estimate apparent result — and that is often times a very poor indication. The missionaries, for example, go on year in and year out laboring faithfully in a heathen city, and nothing seems to happen. People at home begin to get restless and com-

plain. "We spend so many dollars in that field each year and have for years, and it does not pay." It is difficult to speak in any measured terms of such complaints. I remember a certain parish in which it was proposed to the vestry that they should pay a lay reader in charge of a mission three dollars a Sunday instead of two. A vestryman objected on the ground that the parish was not getting anything from the mission now. I do not see how you can expect to get anything for missions or any other church work if such are your ideals. Who knows what is the actual spiritual result of a mission station in China? Plenty of instances could be cited from the mission field where it was only after many years of labor that the work began to show spiritual results. Who can ever estimate the "results" obtained by a faithful teacher. The seed sown may only come to maturity long after the teacher is dead. What God looks to us for is service, loyal and faithful and self-sacrificing. And in such a case there is always this result: that you have obeyed God and done your duty. Possibly that was all God wanted — your service and not results. Other men have labored and you have entered into their labors. Why should not others enter into yours?

Let us look at one more danger — an opposite

one — the danger of externalism. One of the embarrassments of religious work is often the character of the persons who offer themselves. There are certain terribly busy persons who seem possessed by a restless devil. They have an overflowing physical or nervous vitality which seeks to expend itself. They want to work, but they want to work for themselves and in their own way. They are often very "successful" workers, but it is difficult to find any spiritual character to their work. It seems work for work's sake. Then there are people who have a desire to lead, who wish to manipulate other people, who have some social ambition or personal end to gain. They are embarrassing factors because they dispiritualise any work with which they are connected. It is well for us to be pretty clear of our motives in undertaking any work. To be sure our motives are likely to be terribly mixed, we shall not avoid that, but we can be pretty certain of ourselves so far as this — that we can determine whether we have a real love of souls and are seeking God's glory in the work we undertake.

The Christian then goes out to the day's work to labor till the evening closes and the night comes, understanding that the meaning of the work he

is undertaking is the consecration of his powers to God that God may be glorified in him. My work may seem utterly away from God, a mere material toil for my daily bread; but if in it, and through it I am offering myself to God, it has thereby gained a Christian character. My work may seem purely spiritual, the work of a God-given ministry, but if in and through it I am seeking my glory, it has lost all relation to religion. What gives work its character is the consecration of our powers therein.

Consecration, then, shall be our final word; self-immolation upon the Cross of Christ. Consecrate yourself wholly unto God that the life of the Crucified Jesus may be manifest in your life. Be filled with the spirit of consecration and the will of consecration and God himself will provide the means and opportunity of consecration. Only remember that it is not to-morrow that we are to consecrate but to-day. It is a pressing business. It is not future opportunities that will call us but present opportunities that do — opportunities that are calling us out of our lives as they are. Do not waste time in dreams. The Master is come and calleth me — perhaps he has been calling a long time.

Listen to the words of our Lord: "I must

work the works of Him that sent me, while it is yet day; the night cometh, when no man can work."

The night cometh to you also; how near it may be.

And when the night comes and men lay down their lives and go forth in response to God's call into another part of His Kingdom, this is written: "And their works follow them."

What works will follow you?

THE EIGHTH MEDITATION

THE EIGHTH MEDITATION

PAIN

Let us listen to the words of our Lord —

"WHEN thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."

Let us picture —

The death of S. Peter. You remember that he was crucified with his head downward. This is the end of an apostle of our Lord. Since he had known our Lord he had served him most faithfully. That vigorous, impulsive soul had been all eagerness in the service. The labors of an Apostle were no light labors. Recall S. Paul's

catalogue of them: in weariness and painfulness; in cold and nakedness; in watchings and fastings. That must have been the ordinary lot of an Apostle. And now the end comes here, on a cross, derisively. Behold, S. Peter had asked, we have left all and followed thee: What shall we have therefore? Is this the reward? All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecutions.

Consider, first —

That the life our blessed Lord lived was a typical life. In its main features it represents the necessary life of a righteous man in an ungodly world. Our Lord did not ordain useless sufferings for himself; but being what he was, and the world being what it is, suffering was an inevitable consequence. He came into a world of which poverty, and pain, and lack of sympathy, and selfishness are characteristic. In which men are intent on attaining their own ends, and are ready to crush remorselessly whatever opposes, will do to death whatever threatens their chances of gain or their attained position. Do you recognise this remorseless selfishness in yourself? What is your attitude toward what opposes you? Will you hold your own at the expense of another's suffering?

Consider, second —

That we are called in this present life, not to enter into the joy of our Lord, but to repeat in our own experience his life of suffering. In measure, if we will follow Christ faithfully, we must live over his experience. Under our changed conditions we shall find, as he found, suffering in some form a fixed element in life. There are many forms of the one fact; but no soul that has passed the innocence of childhood enters the gate of heaven unmarked with the sign of the cross.

Let us pray, then —

That we may have strength to bear willingly whatever form of suffering God may call us to. Pray for power to accept the Christian vocation: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; we humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which are profitable for us; though Jesus Christ our Lord.

. . . . . .

We live in a world upon which rests ever the awful mysterious shadow of pain. Why pain is,

no man knoweth. It is not the result of sin because it was in the world long before sin was. The world is so made, the sentient world, that it needs must suffer. We see it in the eyes of the stricken animal, and ask our questions of its meaning. We stand by the bed of the child, pain-wracked and agonising, and we cry, Why, O Lord, why? and there is no voice nor any that answers; the heavens are dumb. The secret of it is hidden in the heart of God. And our sole stay under the weight of the problem is there too: we trust in the heart of God. If we had but nature to look to, we should despair. But when we see God revealed in the Crucified we are able to hope and believe, for then we understand that God is love.

It is well to face the facts thus in their extreme form, and the further fact that we have no answer, for, in a way, that clears the ground for us. We are able then to turn our thoughts from useless speculation to the consideration of this; Given pain as a constant factor in human experience, has it any use?

And here we are on firm ground. There is no manner of doubt of the usefulness of pain — and I will use the word in a large sense as including, not only suffering, but all the difficulty and hardness of life.

Pain then — it is on the surface of the matter — is one of the factors which develop life. Our powers are called out through opposition and matured through struggle. Sorrow and suffering are what most purify and soften character if we will let them have their way. If we have been observant of life we have noticed how hard, how unsympathetic, the young are. Their lives have been easy and prosperous and little of suffering of any kind has touched them; and they are cold and hard as burnished steel. To get the ripe mellowness of a true Christian character God had to send them pain. They must come into intimate contact with the hard side of life: must see and feel suffering. There are lands that are so baked hard by the perpetual sunshine that the rain, when it falls, does not sink into the earth but runs immediately off, leaving the land barren and fruitless; but let it once be broken up and it will hold the water of heaven and bring forth abundantly. It is so with human life. The sunshine of perpetual prosperity hardens it; it becomes contented and self-sufficient. If there is discontent, it is the discontent of an unsatisfied appetite, not the divine discontent of a hungry soul. In the soil that sheds the divine grace no spiritual habits take root. There we have the phenomena of worldliness and indifference. Before such men

and women one sets spiritual truth and motive in vain. Really, it is not so much disinclination as an incapacity to understand, that one is dealing with. They do not know what one means by the spiritual life. Talk about grace and the supernatural working of sacraments, and you are talking in an unintelligible language. Appeals to the conscience bound off and leave no mark. What then? God has to put into the life the plowshare of pain and cut the hard surface with sharp furrows. It has to lie prone under the harrow of adversity; it has to have the sign of the cross cut deep into it. Then the scarred and gashed surface will be tender to receive the dew of the divine grace; the soul, feeling its helplessness and its need, will lie open to the rain of heaven and will respond to God's action with fruitfulness. God will not be kept out of our lives; he will break into them by violence if he cannot come in through open doors.

The deeper things of life are the hard and painful things. You look back in your experience and you find that the things that have taught you most, the things by which you have most profited, have not been pleasant and joyful things. Pleasure and joy teach hardly at all; are, unless we are very watchful, causes of spiritual stagnation and spiritual death. It is a common-

place of pastoral experience that the newly married will show spiritual degeneracy. New ties, new duties, leaving less time for spiritual things, people charitably say. A new selfishness, rather, in which God and the claims of God are forgotten. Times of prosperity are not times of liberality; it is another commonplace that the church finds it difficult to raise money when money is plenty.

The fact of the matter is, of course, that we attribute our success and our pleasure to ourselves: we forget our dependence on God when everything is going on prosperously. We cease to feel needs that we cannot satisfy by our own resources, and God fades out of the life which does not feel the constant need of him. Whatever of religious practice is kept up becomes merely formal. And by contrast we see the use of adversity. Adversity breaks down that self-dependence which made us blind to our own needs. It brings to us the conviction that immortal beings cannot be forever satisfied with mortal things. No amount of preaching will bring anything more than a languid assent to these things as probably true. The discovery of our own incapacity will make the truth vivid to us. You know the difference there is between the languid prayer for God's protection which we ordinarily include in our pe-

titions, and the fervent cry of the soul under the stress of immediate danger. And, I repeat, it is pain in one form or another which makes us conscious in this vivid way of most of our needs, and sends us to the feet of God.

Intercession, for example, is a recognised duty of the Christian life: we have no disposition to deny it. We, perhaps, to some extent, practise it. But let the hand of God be laid on one whom we love, let us feel the shudder of apprehension lest the disease end fatally, lest the soul go forth unconverted, and it is quite another matter — our intercession. There is born in us a quite new sense of the control of God over life, of our need of God now. God at once becomes a person to whom we can fly and with whom we can plead.

There is one thing about our Blessed Lord's life which we feel brings him very near to us. If we are asked why, in all our troubles, our heart goes out to him, why we feel that we can so implicitly trust him, why in the deepest pain and sorrow we turn so instinctively to him — knowing all the time that pain and sorrow are of his sending — the secret of it is to be found in one word; his sympathy. The assumption of humanity by the Son of God, his entrance into human experience, has created the bond between us. It is quite useless to tell us that God the Father sympathises

with us too; we believe that, we accept it as a theological truth; but still it does not make the same impression. It may be foolish, but we say to ourselves, our Lord *knows*. Foolish or not, we have confidence in One who has shared our experience. We follow the steps of his most holy life feeling sure that his experience of human pain is making him a safe refuge for us. Well, what we feel, perhaps exaggeratedly, that pain has done for our Blessed Lord, that, certainly, pain does for us: it illumines our hearts. Out of it is born that wealth of sympathy which is one of the priceless possessions of humanity. What would life be without it? The sufferer tosses restless upon his bed, and one comes and lays soothing hands upon the aching head and the pain becomes, not less, but less intolerable. Our heart is breaking with its pent up anguish, but if it can pour itself out to a heart that can understand how instantaneous the relief. The difficulty is lessened as soon as it is shared. The poor child gets rid of its heartache upon its mother's breast. The weary man half solves his problem in the act of telling it. And what gives us this power to still another's pain, to lighten the burden of the weary soul? Just that we have had the like experiences. Not that we have had the same suffering, but that we are also sufferers. Our hearts have ached and

our brains have throbbed and we have gone down into the deep waters of despair. Sympathy is pain-born; it gives us the power to take another's hand and say, *I know*. So we find infinite consolation in the pages of the New Testament because we find revealed there One whom we feel will come and stand by us and take our hand and say, *I know*.

But all our wonderful power of sympathy may be lost, or lessened and wasted. We may make ourselves such that the wearied child will, in loneliness, sob itself to silence sooner than turn to us; that our hearts will be the refuge of no laden souls; that our fellows will repress their grief and assume a stoical calm when the door opens to let us in. And why? Because we have never learned to use our own pain; because suffering has come and touched us with its burning hand and left us scarred and wounded, but unmelted. We have never found our healing at the feet of the Crucified, never sobbed our wearied hearts to rest on the breast of Jesus. It is one of the most terrible things in life, an unaccepted suffering; a suffering that is borne, but borne with a rebellious heart. O the horrible bitterness of it! How it sours the soul with cynicism and contempt. How it poisons the life with bitterness. You have known natures which have turned hard and cold; fixed faces,

worn deep with care-lines, before whose look you instinctively close your heart. You feel that there is a dead heart underneath all that. What has happened? God has come knocking at that heart, and the door was shut. God tried to come into that life, and it would not have him. So the life goes on, growing harder and harder under the touch of God. An old age, hard, bitter, desperate, draws on. There is nothing so awful to look on as an unsanctified old age.

But look at the opposite side of the picture. The soul goes out responsive to the call of God. Suffering is received as opportunity, as a distinct call of God. There is a very evident vocation in suffering if we have the eyes to see it. It is not just the grinding of a hard law that we cannot escape; it is not just the purposeless infliction of a mighty will. Let us try to realise it a little further, try to unravel its meanings. I have spoken of it as discipline, but discipline is manifold.

In the first place there can be no doubt that much of pain is punitive. It comes, not as an arbitrary infliction, but as the result of our own actions. Lawless action cannot be allowed to pass as though it were not. Take, for example, some of the phenomena of waste. The opportunities of life lie open before us in our youth. We seem to ourselves to be looking through the wide-stretched

gates of some Eden where the fruits and flowers of existence are spread out in gleaming beauty. All that the heart can desire is there in unstinted profusion. But our unwise feet carry us first to the pleasantest fruits, not the most profitable. Many of us wake up after years of purely selfish indulgence to find that we have missed the best things. The wasted school days have brought the faulty education and we are perforce shut out from much of the noblest in life. The wantonly squandered strength of youth, which seemed so exhaustless, has worn out, and we have but our jaded and sensitive nerves as the result. We look forward, and we dread to look forward, to the years through which we must drag our exhausted body. We amused ourselves at the expense of others and we have now a critical and harsh judging temper which makes us its slaves. How often the confessor hears the question: Why can I not overcome this habit, why does this defect so retain its hold? The answer in most cases would be plain enough if the penitent would but question his own spiritual history. You have worked for years to plant and train that habit; can you expect to be rid of it in months?

Worst of all are the results of spiritual waste. Years pass in which God has been neglected, or was a mere formula in the life. The needs of

the soul were resolutely put aside. Instead of that regular spiritual development which is the ideal of the Christian life there has been progressive degeneration. The results of this are indifference and lukewarmness. These are the direct penalty of the sin of the neglect of God. And supposing the person to come to himself and desire to return to the Father's house, how difficult the process then is. The spiritual nature that has lain so long atrophied is revived with infinite labor. The taste for divine things which has been so long uncultivated is acquired slowly. The life exhibits a constant tendency to lapse. Put it alongside of a life that has developed normally and you at once see the difference. Why is religion so hard, such an one moans. Religion is hard because sin has made it so; the punishment has at last found the sinner out.

And then there is a pain that is corrective, the object of which would seem to be to keep us sensitive to God. The pain of a wounded conscience is mostly of this nature: it warns us that something is the matter. It is like the physical pain of disease — it calls our attention to the fact of our condition. It insists that, if we sin, it shall at least be with open eyes. If the conscience has been well developed any tentative steps toward sin are at once pointed out. Except in the case where one is

swept away before unexpected and overwhelming temptation, sin is apt to creep upon us by almost insensible gradations. It begins by our yielding in points that seem absolutely innocent, but which involve an abandonment of an ideal, the lowering of the standard. One of the commonest forms will be a conformity to a social custom that is morally debilitating: then will come warnings of conscience that are intended to check this ere it be too late. Or there is the temptation to place ourselves in situations which, while not actually sinful, are next to sin; it is a species of rash action that is all too common. Then, when we think ourselves strong, we find ourselves weak. We have indulged a companionship that we know to be dangerous; we have let ourselves drift into an intimacy which is demoralising; we have been walking on the edge of a moral precipice, and here we are slipping over and clinging to the edge, or lying crushed and broken at the bottom. Well, the pain that we endure is not merely punishment; it is, in God's providence, a warning to us to extricate ourselves ere it be too late. Or the pain comes in this form: we experience a progressive disinclination to spiritual exercise; we feel that we are losing grip on our religious life; it is pain and perplexity to us. But that, too, is a warning, a warning that we need the spiritual physician; that we need to review life and

throw ourselves with fresh zest and enthusiasm into religious activity. Or it may be that we find our way beset with difficulty; we are hindered by obstacles; we are harassed by obstructive circumstances: it is a sign that we need to have our strength called out, it is a corrective of spiritual languor and inertia.

And then there is a third office of pain — the purgatorial; it cleanses and braces the character if we know how to use it. The "Furnace of Affliction" is a frequent Biblical metaphor. Nothing deepens the spiritual character as do the sufferings of life; we feel instinctively the difference between the character that has had no experience of suffering and that which has passed through the "furnace." The Greek conception of Apollo the radiant Sun-god, embodying the perfection of human beauty and joy, we feel could do nothing for us. Between such a conception of perfection and our world-wearied lives, there is no bond. The heart knowing its own bitterness, the soul laden with sorrow, finds no attraction there. The soul turns away to one like itself weary and heavy laden, to a man of sorrows laden with grief. The great of the world are those who have borne the world's burdens and suffered its pains. Not through happiness and gaiety have men and women risen high in the kingdom of God; the saints have

been formed amid toil and tribulation. As you watch their lives you find most likely at the beginning men and women of many imperfections, of wayward passions. But as they go on you realise that the character is being deepened and purified, that it is developing features of spiritual beauty. All the dross is being purged away and the gleam of the gold shines out. And what is doing it? Pain, in one form or another; patient endurance of suffering in some form. They are not as those who float down the stream in gaily decked barges, but they toil slowly upward, and their thought is ever, not of the world that they lose, but of the city that they shall gain. Through the mists of earth that hang heavy about them and chill them and hide their way; through the sunshine of life which glows so gloriously about them, seeking to attract and fascinate them,— through all, they catch the gleam of the gates of the city and hear the echo of the heavenly anthems that float about the throne of God and of the Lamb. It is their endurance here that has so purged their sight that through pain-clouds and tear-mists their eyes ever brighten as the eyes of those who see Him who is invisible.

And we are so faint-hearted through it all, and so doubtful and fear-smitten and passionately resisting. We shake off God's hand and will not

have it so. It is hard bitter treatment that we have little deserved. What have we done? Ah, what have we not done?

"How hast thou merited —
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot.
Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy any love thou art!
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee
Save me, save only me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might seek it in my arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored up for thee at home:
Rise, clasp my hand, and come.

Halts by me that footfall:
Is my gloom after all,
Shade of his hand, outstretched caressingly?
Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am he whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest me.'"

Let us go a stage higher; let us climb to that mountain peak where suffering ceases to be touched by irritation and rebellion and is embraced as matter of sacrifice. There is a saying of S. Paul that throws us into the very heart of suffering. "I fill up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." That saying seems to me to illumine the

whole scene of this pain-stricken world. Back of all experience and all thought there is some inherent necessity for suffering that we cannot fathom. It brought on the sufferings of our Blessed Lord. "It was fitting," the Apostle says, "that the Captain of our salvation should be made perfect through suffering." By being taken up into his body we pass to participation in this sacrificial suffering of the Christ. He still suffers in his body here on earth. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" All suffering willingly endured for his sake passes into union with his sacrifice. It joins us to his sacrificial action. The sorrows and pains of life are things given to the Christian that he may have somewhat to offer. They are the way of union with the cross. They are not punishment or displeasure, but love — the same love that upraised a cross on Calvary.

It is none the less hard? No, surely not. The cross was never easy, though it was the salvation of the world. But once having seen suffering as sacrifice, we are not going to struggle to escape it. We are not going to barter our cross for all the joy of the world. For we have seen once and for all that the service of the cross is the supreme thing in life, because it is to us, as it was to Christ, the mark of acceptance and love. And "to serve God and to love him is higher and better than happiness,

though it be with pierced hands and wounded brows and hearts laden with sorrow."

"But if, impatient, thou let slip thy cross,
Thou wilt not find it in this world again,
Nor in another; here, and here alone
Is given thee to suffer for God's sake.
In other worlds we shall more perfectly
Serve him and love him, praise him, work for him,
Grow near and nearer to him with all delight.
But there we shall not any more be called
To suffer, which is our appointment here.
So if himself he come to thee, and stand
Beside thee, gazing down on thee with eyes
That smile, and suffer; that will smite thy heart
With their own pity, to a passionate peace;
And reach to thee himself the Holy Cup,
(With all its wreathen stems of passion-flowers
And quivering sparkles of the ruby stars),
Pallid and Royal, saying, Drink with me;
Wilt thou refuse? Nay, not for Paradise!
The pale brow will compel thee, the pure hands
Will minister unto thee; thou shalt take
Of that Communion through the solemn depths
Of the dark waters of thine agony,
With heart that praises him, that yearns to him
The closer through that hour. Hold fast his hand,
Though the nails pierce thine, too! Take only care
Lest one drop of the Sacramental wine
Be spilled, of that which ever shall unite
Thee, soul and body, to thy Living Lord!

Therefore gird up thyself, and come, to stand
Unflinching under the unfaltering hand,
That waits to prove thee to the uttermost.
It were not hard to suffer by his hand,
If thou couldst see his face;— But in the dark!
That is the one last trial;— be it so.
Christ was forsaken, so must thou be too:
How couldst thou suffer but in seeming, else?
Thou wilt not see the face, nor feel the hand,
Only the cruel crushing of the feet,
When through the bitter night the Lord comes down
To tread the wine-press.— Not by sight, but faith,
Endure, endure,— be faithful to the end!"

THE NINTH MEDITATION

THE NINTH MEDITATION

DISCIPLINE

Listen to the words of St. Paul —

THEY do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."

Let us try to picture —

An athletic contest. These men have not come carelessly into the field from their duties of life. They stand here at the end of a long preparation. Every muscle has been carefully exercised. Through months they have been looking forward to this hour, and to try their strength against others they have been willing to endure hardship and self-denial. The ordinary pleasures of life have been put aside. They have lived on plain fare. And now, when the hoped for day has come,

they have only a chance of victory. And after all, the end, if gained, is a perishing thing: "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown."

Consider, first —

That the end of a Christian life is an incorruptible crown and the reward of all true striving is certain. It is not, that run as we will, we may still miss the prize, but all win who run well. We are placed in this world to go through this contest. We are surrounded, not by shouting crowds of our fellows, but those who watch us are looking out of the unseen — we are surrounded by a "Cloud of witnesses"— the angels, the saints, Jesus. How should we not run well?

Consider, second —

The feebleness with which you have heretofore run this race. What has been the laxity of your life; your feebleness in devotion; the ease with which you have been diverted from spiritual things; the lack of zeal in work; the preoccupation of pleasure; the indifference to ideals. You saunter across the course, looking at the spectators, admiring the scenery. Would anyone suspect that you were contending against the fiercest of adversaries — the world, the flesh, the devil — contending for an incorruptible crown? Does not the

supposition sound like mockery, sarcasm? What is the amount of your interest in this contest? Is it comparable to your interest in the next reception, the latest fashions? You . . . contending!

Let us pray then —

That God may give us some appreciation of the relative importance of things. Pray that He will fill you with the spirit of discipline.

It is pleasant to go out into the forest, and sit where the light filters down through the fretwork of branches and leaves, and weaves fast-shifting patterns over the mossy ground. What calm joy there is in the sight of the untamed greenery working its will; the tangle of hazel thickets, the climbing grape-vines, the matted and impenetrable growths of blackberry. Nature, we think, untouched, uncontrolled, is surpassingly beautiful. No doubt, beautiful; but also wasteful. Really what is going on here is a struggle for existence. These trees and vines, these bushes and brambles, are fighting for their very lives. Here you shall see some bent and shrivelled sapling, its life being crushed out in the tremendous struggle; there a tree stands dying in the grasp of a luxuriant parasite; there, again, a pale flower clings to a waning life. There is not energy enough in earth to sup-

port all that strives to live upon it. Some must give way. It will be the problem of civilisation, once understood, to control this energy; to direct it to beneficence; to preserve the useful and destroy the useless. As it is now, one growth checks and hinders another and the highest result is lost.

It is so in human life. Life — any life — as it starts, is full of possibilities and potencies. The total amount of energy there is enormous. And the question of the future, as between usefulness and waste, is a problem of direction, of control. Of possible lines of development, certain have to be chosen and others rejected. Of the various powers there are some that we want as the highest perfection, there are others that we do not want at all. Of the multitudinous habits that we might form, some will be useful to us, others not. And always the growth of some will mean the death of others; no more in life than in the forest can every growth that starts, survive; some will perish in the struggle. And shall this be left to what we call chance, or shall there preside over our lives a wise spirit of choice and direction?

All of us have gone on some way in this process. There have been deaths and survivals in our lives. There are growths which are deep rooted and luxuriant; there are pale and anæmic growths. Consciously or unconsciously we have been exercising

choice all our lives and there is to-day in us what we have chosen shall be there. There is really no chance about it, what we call chance is the result of unnoticed choice.

We look back, it may be, and bewail the fact that the path has led us hitherward. We see now where we have diverged from the path of spiritual progress, and we know that to return means loss of time, and the destruction of what we have acquired by years of labor. But the thing to fix our eyes upon is that we are what we are as the result of choice by the action of free will. We are to-day what we have thought it worth while to be.

But fortunately this action of free will upon life, this process of control which we call discipline, is always possible. It is true that we shall be to-morrow what we will to be. Essentially, we are always what we *will*. Of course, not in the sense of full accomplishment, but in the sense of determinate effort and aim which is pregnant of future success. One of the things most notable about Christianity is its hopefulness, it despairs of no man till the grave closes over him. It never despairs, because its ultimate reliance is upon the grace of God. Let it be that one's life has been largely waste; that one awakes to the consciousness of spiritual possibilities and finds oneself handi-

capped with a disastrous past. Still, the future is not mere gloomy reaping of foregone results, but is bright with the glory of coming accomplishment. For again, the whole life is in the *willing;* and a converted will means ultimately a changed life. Other religions have despaired of men who had made failures, have thrust them out as the dirt and refuse of society; Christianity comes to all with words of hope. "Let him that stole, steal no more." "Be not conformed to this world, but transformed." What, once more, it looks to is the *willing.* But the *willing* and the results of it mean hard work. Christianity is no holiday parade; no waving of flags over sun-lighted fields. Christianity means warfare; means, first and last and always, discipline.

There is no such thing as a strong life which is an undisciplined life. There are lives which exhibit strong growths or passions, but are not at all strong lives because they lack balance; the growth or passion is inordinate, and hinders other developments. A Christian life displays a well-rounded and balanced growth. Its aim is the perfect development of all desirable elements of character. "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect." It is not the perfection of God, which is infinite and unapproachable, but a perfection which is like God's in that it is well-

rounded and symmetrical. We are constantly running across types of life which lay claim to a high degree of perfection, which, when examined, are sure to be merely one-sided developments. There is a type of good man to-day, which is exalted in opposition to Christians; a man who has a high conception of honorable and pure conduct in business and social relations; he is a good husband and father, charitable and kindly. Here, people say, is a man better than your religious people. He proves the needlessness of religion and the church. Possibly, if this world is all the world there is; but when you look at him carefully, he is of this world merely. A very finished product, no doubt, so far as the process goes; but the weak point is that there is no spiritual side to the character. Attention has been concentrated on the production of a few qualities which have reference to merely social duties. Whatever has reference to God is atrophied and dead.

Just what then do we mean by a disciplined life? Well, pretty much what you mean by a disciplined or cultivated field. It means a life that is ordered by foresight and not by chance; a life that is governed by principle and not by whim. We watch children with amusement, it may be, struck with the lack of continuity and the degree in which they are the sport of mere impulse; tak-

ing up or laying down their occupations or games, as the present emotion suggests. We can go on all our lives that way, if we will. We may take up a line of study or a kind of church work, and pursue it till the surface interest fades, and then throw it down for something else. We realise to-day that there is a weak place in our character and determine to set ourselves to strengthen it; but before we have accomplished anything, some faulty habit makes its existence obtrusive and we turn aside to deal with that. To-day we are going to be more regular and careful about our self-examination; to-morrow it is sins of the tongue which seem in urgent need of attention; the next day our deficiencies in prayer absorb us. It is the child's lack of continuity and persistence; and nothing is ever really accomplished. In the course of the year we give some passing attention to all our faults, but we give no persistent attention to any one, and at the end of the year we are surprised to find that we are where we were at the beginning.

Now the first requisite to the improvement of the character is wise foresight, the deliberate judgment of the life and the determination of what needs to be done. That means also the determination of what needs doing first, of what is most feasible and wisest to undertake first. One of the most

common obstacles to spiritual success is the tendency to attempt too much at once. The secret of success is *concentration.* One thing at a time is a very good rule. But it is well to attack a strategic point; the up-rooting of a sin which is far-reaching in its influence, the acquisition of a virtue which is like to control development. A wise general judges his ground and makes his dispositions accordingly. Know at the very outset what you want to do. You are not merely attacking an enemy, but attacking an enemy entrenched in strong position. It is not worth while frittering away attention on an outpost of Satan such as wandering thoughts, if your judgment is habitually uncharitable, or your words habitually insincere. There is little use in attacking a special manifestation of a sin, like fondness for praise, or conceit, when the root-sin itself — pride — is neglected. It will, of course, be found that the destruction of the root-sin will mean the death of all its progeny.

The next requisite is perseverance. We are so apt to be discouraged with our progress. We expect to succeed at once. No result comes at once in the spiritual life. People fail to appreciate the slowness with which spiritual habits are formed, and the ease with which ground which has been apparently gained, is lost. The frequent fall is an essential part of discipline; it is the

necessary testing of apparent growth in strength to demonstrate its reality — or the reverse. Sin and failure have at least this of value, that they provide us with the necessary knowledge of our true state. For if we are easily cast down by failure, we are optimists in regard to our acquirements and progress before they have been tried. The successful overcoming of temptation for a short period almost always gives us the conceit that we have won our battle and may relax our guard. And then a little wholesome experience of the little we have really gained, throws us into as reasonless despair. We need to learn to be content with small gains made slowly and with effort, glad that we have improved at all. A crisis comes usually when having really made considerable progress, we come to a stand-still. The most obvious faults have been corrected. Certain habits of religion have been acquired. There seems little more that is feasible; it is time to rest. It is really a time of testing. What we have done so far has been rather in the nature of surface work. It is comparatively easy, if we have any degree of earnestness, to clear the ground and put the surface of the life in order; to get rid of obvious sins, and to acquire regular habits. But after that has been done we enter a new region. What we have to deal with now is not so much conduct as motive.

The discipline of word and act is comparatively easy; the discipline of thought and intention is what requires hard work. And yet we cannot boast of much success till this inner discipline has been in some measure exercised upon us; till we have acquired that habit of watchfulness which enables us to see the sin in the germ, so to say, and kill it there. The suggestive thought, the inordinate desire, the unruly impulse, these are the things to attract attention and to be carefully held in check. And in regard to such things there is no time for rest; in the inner struggle there is no finality. Life — not a few years of life — is given us as the time of struggle; and till the breath leaves the body there is no certainty that we may not yet be overcome. There is certainty that we shall be, if we relax our watchfulness.

We shall probably find that in practical dealing with ourselves we need, as I have already indicated, to concentrate attention. We shall need in a way to dissect the character, and deal with one thing at a time. Thus shall we slowly arrive at an adequate discipline of self.

And when we get to close quarters with our problem, we shall probably realise, what we have not realised before, how helpful, how almost indispensable, a rule of life is. Ultimately a disciplined life will mean a life subject to rule. But

when a rule of life is proposed, there is protest at once. You priests think people have nothing to do but say their prayers and go to church! I assure you, no. My experience of the amount of prayers people say, and the number of times they go to church, has not led me to any such conclusions. It is just the opposite, that life is so crowded, that I feel the necessity of rule. Rule raises in people's minds a vision of a lot of fussy observances, such as you find recommended in books of devotion of a certain type. Now because you cannot always remember the last thing before you go to sleep that you may die before morning, or because you do not find it practical to say texts while you are doing your hair, it does not at all follow that a rule of life is impractical. By a rule of life, I mean a certain orderliness and control which shall assure that the ordinary duties of a Christian life are attended to, and that all the elements of it have their proper share of attention. A rule is not good in proportion to its elaborateness, but in proportion to its workableness. The reason why people find rules impractical is because they take a rule and try to force the life into it, instead of adapting a rule with special reference to the circumstances of life. A rule which is good and workable for one person, may not be for another, even though the circum-

stances of life may be much the same. For that reason, then, there is no good of my suggesting a rule which might not fit anyone, and by which someone, trying to keep it and finding it impractical, would be convinced of the uselessness of rules altogether.

I may, however, without attempting to draw up a rule, suggest some of the things which a rule aims to accomplish.

In the first place, of course, it deals with prayer. It tries to effect that there shall be a fixed minimum of prayer in the life. So far as may be it allots time for prayer, but it aims rather at getting the special amount of prayer, than the special time. Special time is valuable, as tending to steady the life; but do not put so much stress on time, that if the special time is broken into it does not seem worth while to say the prayers at all. Intercessions which we intended to say in the morning should by all means be said then, rather than adjourned unnecessarily. Other things should be adjourned to them if possible. But if they have to be given up then, the afternoon or evening are good times too. What reasonably should be done on Thursday, *can* be done on Friday. Only I think it is of obligation, if we are going to prosper religiously, that each week find time for intercession. Sundays generally afford special opportuni-

ties. Instead of being ten minutes late for service, suppose you were to be ten minutes early; or if not that, suppose you stay ten minutes after; and then, if you can so far conquer the Anglican *mauvaise honte* at being seen on your knees for any length of time when there is no obvious reason for it, and so far control your mind as not to wonder what Mrs. Jones is thinking about you, you will find that you can manage your weekly intercession pretty well. Or if you are fortunate enough to be in a parish where a late Celebration is the rule, the intervals of the service afford a good deal of time for intercession. It is largely a matter of knowing how to use time. I have known really very pious ladies who had not the remotest conception of doing anything during a service which is not set down in the Prayer Book. Who were annoyed by the ablutions after the Celebration, and were astonished by a suggestion that they afforded a very good opportunity to make one's thanksgiving. Really, when people tell me that they have no time for intercession, I am inclined to think that what is wanting is not time, or inclination, but a little common sense, and the ability to act a little differently from other people. We are all like sheep, in more senses than one.

And then there is that other necessary element of a regulated life,— self-denial. Self-denial may

take a good many forms,— what special form we shall require, our own circumstances must determine. But certainly no life can be spiritually healthy into which it does not enter as a pretty large element. It may be on the social side of life that we need it. Pleasure, or even what we choose to consider social duty, may be absorbing us altogether too much. It goes without saying that we do not think so. We have our place in society to fill, etc. But it is easy to make a fairly workable test. What is the relative amount of time spent socially and in the service of God? Broadly speaking, are we subordinating God to self — because society is *self? Self* is omnipresent and intrusive, and it is quite an easy matter for it to put on the mask of pressing duty. It is a matter of relative values here; one of the places in life where nice judgment is required. Where a marked distinction between right and wrong stares us in the face we have little difficulty of deciding, whatever difficulty we may have in acting. But here, as so often in matters disciplinary, it is a matter of proportion and of emphasis. A little thing sways the balance to one side or the other; it seems of no great moment, and yet the final issues are tremendous — all the difference between a worldly and a consecrated life, it may be. We may take this to guide us in any case — it is axio-

matic — that the service of God is first or nowhere. A service which consists mainly in giving Him what we have no special use for, which throws Him money we do not care about, and time that we do not care to use otherwise; which, if one may venture to say so, treats God as a dog to be fed with the scraps which fall from our table; that, in plain language, is what a religion without self-denial means. It is unnecessary to point out its inadequacy to any spiritual ends.

Self-denial certainly means the limitation of self in some way. It is a power of suffering. It means the sacrifice to God, not of what we do not want, but of what we do. It means that in giving, we are giving up. It means that in work we are doing what it is inconvenient to do. That we are giving time that we would fain spend otherwise. That we are ruled in our actions by a severe conception of duty. What sort of an abortive performance is a convenient religion? You will serve God when it is convenient to do so! You will spend your energies so far as suits your convenience! Religion shall be fitted into your life as a by-play. Your support of it shall be regulated in the same way that you regulate a purchase of opera tickets or a subscription to a club.

As I have pointed out, discipline must extend

over the whole nature. There is no use in intermittent or partial discipline, by which I do not mean imperfect discipline; discipline which is going on, though it has not yet accomplished its results. There is small use in the laborious cultivation of little patches of garden amid vast stretches of weeds. They will speedily be overrun. And yet one constantly feels that people imagine that they can purchase indulgence in certain directions by strictness in others; that a virtue may be made to offset a sin. Strict adherence to social morality is no excuse for neglect of worship. Nor is sedulous attendance upon worship an offset to worldliness. Religious observances are ridiculous and disgusting in a person who makes no attempt to control temper, or to be charitable in judgment, or who trifles with the truth.

The whole field of the passional nature needs to feel the bridle of careful training. Christians, just by virtue of their professed principles, are bound to be much more careful than other people. The tongue, e. g., as S. James pointed out, is an unruly evil. The temper is constantly leading to offence. The sensual appetites are constantly reasserting themselves and demanding gratification. Pride is a sin which holds sway in many a life unrecognised. It is one of the subtlest of sins, capa-

ble of infinite transformation. With such fields of activity calling us to work, how can we dream of rest?

And then there is all the other side of the matter; that discipline means not only repression, but development. We are not aiming at emptiness, but completeness. The real work of discipline comes when we begin the positive work of trying to build up spiritual character. We have to remember that we live under the Gospel, not under the law. The ten commandments are not sufficient ideal of a moral life. They are the ethics of an undeveloped people, and while they do contain the germ of all ethics, they need to have that germ developed and stated positively. The Christian law of conduct is found in the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes embody the ideal life.

But one may give a literal adherence to the Ten Commandments, and be very far from the acquirement of the virtues of the Beatitudes. So our discipline, if it is to aim at completeness, must be directed to the development of spiritual character. Such discipline will be found to lie in the direction of spiritual activities; in searching preparation for the sacraments, and frequent and devout reception of them; and in the exercise of the immature spiritual powers. For example, such a virtue as loving-kindness is not attained by keeping

one's temper; nor is it attained by talking platitudes about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It is to be gained by the exercise of the sympathetic powers in kindly and helpful intercourse with our fellows. Purity is not the being without sensual sin; purity is the love of pure things,— is the pure hands and the clean heart which of all the virtues, makes us most God-like; brings most into sympathy with God. Really what we want to develop is that soul-hunger which is characteristic of the saints. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

I think one could almost put it in this way: That discipline is the power of selection by which we learn to choose out of life those things which are best and noblest, and to reject the things which are inferior, whether they be right in themselves or no. We have to learn, out of the multitudinous possibilities of life, to gather those, and just those, that will be permanent — permanent, because they have relation to God. All things are possible for me, but all things are not expedient, and it is a very crude judgment that classifies all things as either right or wrong, and therefore allowable or not. There is a higher point of view. The point of view from which all things are envisaged as they will or will not promote our spiritual growth.

Many things which are in themselves allowable, will be rejected by one striving after sanctity, because they do not promote the main aim of life, and take up energy which can be better employed. I have no time, the great scientist said, to make money. Not because the making of money is evil, but because it is not the eternal thing. The time required to make it could be so much better employed. So the Christian must feel that there are so many things for which he has no time. His energies are all too small to work out the great work of his sanctification. That is the supreme thing. We look out on the landscape, sun-kissed and glorious, in the flashing beauty of the early morning. But if we catch sight of a form we love, the beauty of the morning is forgotten; we have no eyes for lesser things as we look upon the joy of our hearts; so the Christian sees much that is infinitely attractive in the world about him, but the radiance of this world is dimmed by the vision of the King in His beauty, and lost in the radiance of the coming Christ.

THE TENTH MEDITATION

THE TENTH MEDITATION

THE SUPERNATURAL

Listen to the word of God —

HE mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

Let us picture —

The prophet and his servant girt about with enemies. To the servant no means of escape appears. He is overwhelmed with fear at the peril. In the midst of the peril the prophet is unmoved; he is undisturbed because he sees not the power of man, but the power of God. If God be on his side what can man do unto him. He knows that, invisible to the human eye, there are at hand all the powers of the heavenly world. The eye of

faith sees them — the invisible hosts of God. He prays that the trembling servant may see them too. And God opens his eyes, and lo! the mountain is full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about them.

Consider, first —

This is not exceptional, but usual. The Lord standeth round about His people. There are invisible guarding presences of the Spiritual order about us even now; never are we alone. The guarding, controlling, guiding ministers of God, are by our side. They are sent out by Him to minister to the heirs of Salvation. Why fear? Do you doubt God's power? Or do you doubt God's revelation — that there are powers which are to you invisible? If you believe, why fear? There are horses and chariots of fire around us even now.

Consider, second —

How often you have had personal experiences of the care of God. You can remember — can you not — times in your lives when it seemed as though the veil had become very thin and you could almost see through it? If you could not see the horses and chariots, you were very certain that they were there. You have been in some Dothan,

surrounded by your enemies, with the cares, the anxieties, the troubles of life, and you became discouraged and saw no way of escape; and then you said your prayers, you made your communion, and your eyes were opened and you saw the chariots of God. Then you understood that what was wrong was not that the Syrians were strong, but that you were blind. What you needed was not a changed world, but a deeper faith, and in the power of that faith you went out to meet your enemies, now helpless.

Pray then that your eyes may be opened —

That you may have that clear eye of faith which holds fast to the revealed facts of God's working. O God, open thou our eyes.

We always find it difficult to get ourselves disentangled from the type of thought prevalent in our time. The thought of any time proceeds upon certain premises which it takes for granted, and any questioning of which is regarded as, at least, eccentric. A species of moral pressure is brought to bear upon one to accept them. They are not matter of argument, but of assumption. A rationalistic writer has explained to us that the real reason of disbelief in miracles is not so much a dissatisfaction with the evidences for their occur-

rence, as that belief in any supernatural interference in the world is utterly alien to the intellectual attitude of the time. Men waive aside stories about miracles in the same way that they waive aside stories about fairies or ghosts. They are not matter for serious investigation. We live in a time of deadly materialism. The atmosphere of it wraps us round. From its earliest childhood the boy or girl has ideals of a purely material success held up. The aim of life is to get money, or to get pleasure. The child of tender years is encouraged to undertake some scheme whereby a few pennies may be earned, and is highly praised for success. Its business ability is being developed, forsooth, because it has gained a few dirty pennies. People's dreams of their children's future are easily translatable into dollars and cents. It is surely a misfortune if the life turn otherwhere. We imagine the shock with which the average father and mother learns that the boy wishes to enter the priesthood; the daughter thinks of the religious order. It is right that in the interests of material success, son or daughter should go to China or Australia, with faint prospect of returning for years, at any rate; that is sad, no doubt; but it is borne with stoical firmness in the interest of the child's future. *What future?* Here and now. But what about the *broader future?* Is

this world all that has claims? Why the shudder when you think of the child in China, not making money, but representing Jesus Christ! I fancy that there would be no cry over the decline in number of candidates for orders; no laments of sisterhoods over works offered that they cannot take; no sorrowful turning away from opportunities in the mission field, if children were offered to God, instead of to Mammon; if they were perpetually held out by willing hands to the Living Christ, for Him to take and use as seemed good.

What is the matter? We are *materialists.* We believe in this world, and love it with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We are idolators of the visible and tangible. Our trust is in the senses. God, and all God implies, is a theory to us, not the supreme object of our being. We move through the world stolidly, without the ever present sense of its mysteries, without the haunting consciousness of its evanescence; of the reality of the unseen things, of the elsewhere and the beyond. And yet the world is vibrant with the presence of God; of God revealing himself in the beauty of the creation. Christianity is sometimes accused of having adopted features of paganism; at any rate the pagan view of the world is infinitely preferable to the material with which we are being crushed to-day. It at least saw God

everywhere, if it saw Him crudely and imperfectly. It were better surely to see in the saffron clouds which go before the sunrise, the flocks of the heavenly shepherd going forth to their pasture, or to hear the voices of nymphs in the whisper of forest leaves, than to see nothing but the phenomena of matter. To the pagan these things were the glorious garments of an ever-present divinity; and whom they ignorantly worshipped, the Christ has declared unto us.

Oh! to get rid of the tyranny of the senses; of our implicit assumption that what they reveal to us is all there is! Really the senses are limitations set about our spiritual nature; blank walls which shut in our vision. Out beyond them there is a world we do not perceive. We are familiar with the teachings of science that there are whole worlds of light and sound which we do not touch at all; colors and harmonies we do not perceive. After all, we are little better than blind and deaf as we go through a world of subtle colorings and entrancing harmonies which the too gross senses fail to interpret to us. If our ears were but opened, might we not even now hear the songs of the angels as they go on their errands of mercy, and catch some far-off echo of the music of the harpers harping on their harps?

Revelation strives to impress upon us this les-

son which we learn with difficulty — slaves as we are of the seen and the tangible — that the other world is the supersensible world about us here and now. Not a distant *place,* but a mode of existence, which we cannot understand through the senses, but which is *spiritually* discerned. The *spirit* is the proper organ of vision for the things of the spirit. The supernatural is not distant, but here and now. God is one and omnipresent; God is here and now. Here are angels and demons. Here is the constant battle-ground of the powers of light and darkness. Here are souls indwelt by God, and souls self-sold to the slavery of Satan. All scripture implies and teaches this; all the services of the church assume that we are in the very presence of God; and, of course, not of God as an abstract conception, but of a living and working God. That spirit deals with the spirit, and person speaks with person. Do you really believe in the presence of God?

Really we have to be educated out of our belief in the supernatural. Under the stress of materialistic education, if we hold to the belief at all, it becomes a mere theory to us, not an actuality. But it is an actuality to the child; the child has to be sophisticated out of it. But the instinct abides often, and charlatans find easy prey in it, abusing it and their own ends. Such gross super-

stitions as spiritualism thrive upon it, with their alleged communications with souls. We may set all that aside. Certainly God would not make souls subject to the class of people who deal in such phenomena. If there be any truth at all in their alleged facts, it is doubtless the working of Satan. That there is no actual communication with the spirits of the dead is evident from the banality of the answers obtained.

What we have to do then, is to realise the presence of God and the unseen — of God not distant from the world, but in the world. When we have once made that a fact, religion becomes natural to us; otherwise it must remain more or less a strain.

For example, a *miracle* falls into its place as not an interference in nature, but as a perfectly natural occurrence; as much a lawful thing as a sunrise. It is in no wise strange that in certain cases, God has to work in unusual ways. The unusualness of Christ, explains at once that His entrance into human life should be attended by unusual phenomena. But we must beware of the assumption that because miracles are unusual and suited to crises in the spiritual education of the race, therefore the supernatural is unusual and may ordinarily be disregarded. "Ye shall do greater things than these," our Lord said to His followers; and surely He did not mean works more

striking and wonderful than the miracles He performed. He must certainly have been pointing on to the ordinary powers of the Church which were to be the outcome of the presence of God the Holy Ghost dwelling within the Body of Christ. There we touch the supernatural as a daily phenomena in life, vastly more wonderful than miracles. Wonderful no doubt, was the foretold birth of S. John Baptist from parents well stricken in years; but what was the wonder of it in comparison with the daily act in the Christian Church whereby the child is regenerate and made partaker of the divine nature? Awe-inspiring, no doubt, was the spectacle of one coming back from the dead; but what is that to the daily resurrection of souls, when the guilt of sin falls away and they are restored to purity: "I absolve thee from all thy sins." Passing strange was the spectacle of multitudes fed with the multiplied bread; but what is that to the daily wonder of souls fed with the Body and Blood of Christ? Ye shall do greater works than these. Surely if we at all appreciate the Sacramental action of the church, we feel that in it we are placed in communion with the other world as a matter of daily experience.

And again: the same conviction comes to us as we ponder the meaning of the creed: — I believe in the Communion of Saints. — That surely does

not mean the dealings which the members of the Church Militant have with one another. It really is very extraordinary, the feeling that the average Christian seems to have of the finality of death. People turn away from the dead with a feeling that all that remains to us now is a memory, which, in the nature of things, will be blurred by the passing of time. "There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave. There are no voices which are not soon mute, however tuneful. There is no name, with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last." Our fate is, "like streaks of morning cloud, to fade into the infinite azure of the past." Such, no doubt, is the ordinary view; but it is hardly a Christian view.

To the Christian, death is but an incident, overwhelmingly important as terminating one's period of probation, but still only incidental in view of one's relation to the Church of God. We pass out of the familiar scenes of human existence; we do not pass out of the communion of the Catholic Church. We pass, as it were, into another room in the palace of the Great King; we are assigned to duty elsewhere. The life which seemed so full of promise here, before which there appeared just opening long years of usefulness, is cut off, and we grieve. But the cutting short cannot mean

more or other than that God has called it elsewhere to serve him. The grief of parting is inevitable; but the sense of the futility and failure of the life is unreasonable. There is no failure in any work well done, in any life well lived, though it seem to us cut short in the midst of its usefulness. Its true work is the work God may at any time call it to; its real usefulness is usefulness to the Kingdom of God.

The dreary, hopeless sense of utter separation from the dead, is also an unchristian thing. A separation of sight is not an utter separation. We and the blessed dead alike, abide in the union of the Body of Christ. We enjoy the Communion of Saints. And surely, that communion is a very real thing. The sense of our being one family is not destroyed though the members of the family are far scattered over the face of the earth. And why should it be if they are scattered in the Kingdom of God? There remain bonds which unite us. There is the sense of being still engaged in a common service, seeking common ends. We meet in the common worship of the one Lord. The "Lamb as it had been slain" is the common object of worship in Heaven and in Earth. And, what perhaps appeals to us more, there are still offices and duties which we fulfil towards one another. The duty of mutual intercession cer-

tainly cannot end with death. At the Altar-throne of Jesus, we still meet in prayer. The dead are, no doubt, removed from temptation; as we understand temptation; but it is a very narrow view of prayer to understand it as a mere defence against sin. The state of the soul in another world, is the state of a creature which lives and therefore is capable of progress, and if it is helped in its progress here by the prayers of the Church, surely there also. It has attained somewhat but not all. And then, our commemoration of the dead before God, is surely answered by their commemoration of us before the same God. We do not need to know how far, if at all, they know what is going on in this world; they know what God wills they should know. But if our ignorance of their occupations does not hinder that their names are constantly on our lips, and their memories in our hearts when we kneel before the One God, neither will their ignorance, if so be they are ignorant, hinder their prayers for us. They at least know how sorely we need prayers. And it would seem that there is nothing which will keep our love alive, and prevent us fading out of one another's memory but such mutual offices of appeal. It is quite horrible to think of meeting in the other world those whom we have once loved and then forgotten — meeting them as ill-

remembered strangers; recalled with effort after long separation. If anything can sadden the blessed dead, it must be the ease with which we forget them.

There is another, and even more neglected side of our subject. We get into the way of assuming that the narratives of scripture represent an abnormal state of things; instead of being the lifting of veils, and the bringing to sight of what is the usual fact. Our Lord's temptation brings before us the struggle of a human soul with the personal power of evil. Well, temporary conditions apart, what is there abnormal about that? We are told that after his trial he was ministered to by angels. Well, shall we doubt that that, too, is the common case? If there be any truth in the scripture portrayal of life, the good and evil powers of the unseen world touch human life all the time. There are times when we cannot doubt that the sudden inrush of evil thought is distinctly a personal attack upon the soul.

There are times when our deliverance from temptation or danger compels the conclusion of a personal intervention upon our behalf. We let ourselves be terrorised by modern materialism out of what are the plain facts of existence. I know a case in which two old people were sleeping peacefully. They were suddenly awakened by

something which they thought indicated that some one was trying to enter the house. They got out of bed, and immediately after a heavy cornice fell across their pillow. It would have been certain death. You may call their escape an accident if you like. That does not appeal to me as an explanation. Have the angels and demons who so touched lives that are portrayed in Holy Scripture, passed out of existence, or are they taking vacation now? There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in the philosophy of materialism.

"In the science of sound there are partial tones, which are unheard, but which blend with the tones that are heard, and make all the difference between the paltry note of the poorest instrument and the supreme note of the violin. So, in the science of life, in the crowded street or market-place or theatre, or wherever life is, there are partial tones, there are unseen presences. Side by side with the human crowd is a crowd of unseen forms; Principalities and Powers and Possibilities. These are unseen but not unfelt; they enter into the houses of human beings that are seen, and for their coming some are swept and garnished, and they abide there, and the last state of those human beings is radiant with a divine light and resonant with an added tone; or, on the

contrary, it may be that, haunted by spirits more wicked than themselves, the last state of such beings is worse than before — subject to a violence and tyranny abhorrent even to themselves; impalpable and inevitable, as it would seem, even to the confines of despair."

What is really the fundamental question is: — Do we believe in God in any adequate way? In God — a living Being — present and active in the world? We may believe all things are governed by "Law." But law explains nothing to me, save as it is the expression of a personal will. All the phenomena of life about me in the world are understandable as expressions of a divine life: Otherwise, not at all. Science cannot tell us of what life is or how it came to be. But Holy Scripture tells us of the Holy Ghost, whom we are taught to believe is the Life-giver. In the unanalysable life of the flower which grows by the wayside, I see the working of the ever-present Spirit of life. There are minds to whom

> "The primrose by the river's brim,
> A yellow primrose was to him
> And it was nothing more."

Nothing more — not a revelation of the Divine; not a thing clothed with a supernal beauty on

which the over-flowing love of God has been lavished.

What a difference it makes in life whether we conceive ourselves to live in a world which is as a clock wound up at the beginning of things, presided over by a Being whose sole function is to see that the wheels go round properly, or whether it is a world of Divine activities. In the one case, we sink under the oppressive sense of our utter helplessness. We are in the grip of fate, and can neither make nor mar. It is hopeless to cry out into the unseen; it is hopeless to expect any aid in trouble. The wheels of God grind on,— slower or faster,— and God grinds as helplessly as we. We can do nothing but set our teeth and go grimly on.

It is otherwise if God be, what we say we believe him to be, a person who is love. There, behind the veil of things, and yet not far from any one of us, there is an ear to hearken and a hand to save. Then are we conscious of being guarded by angelic presences who come to us from standing in the presence of God — for are not we the heirs of Salvation to whom they are sent forth to minister?

And surely the practical lesson is near at hand. "I will go softly all the days of my life," said the King, conscious of the intervention of God

in his life. We shall go softly, with a sense of the mystery that life is, lived thus in the presence of unseen powers. Surely God is in this place, and we shall be conscious of his presence, ruling all our thoughts and desires, checking all our passionate wilfulness by the thought of his ever-nearness. Thou God seest me, will be the ever-present thought of the heart. Our spiritual sight shall be cleared to see the chariots and horses of fire round about us. How shall not, as we live our lives as those who see him who is invisible — how shall not every inordinate desire shrink abashed away, every glowing passion be soothed back to peace. Our prayers shall gain force and and our sacraments reality, as they become, not proper religious observances, but doors opening out into the other world. There will be no need for us to strain aching eyes out into an impenetrable darkness, or grope blindly after an unknown power, for our God is not inscrutable power, but revealed love.

"Where is a God?" doth weary Reason say —
"I see but starlit skies."
"Where is the sun?" So calleth at noonday
The man with sightless eyes.
Thou little child, from thee God is not far;
Look inward, not above;
Thou needest not to roam from star to star,
For God is Love."

THE ELEVENTH MEDITATION

THE ELEVENTH MEDITATION

THANKSGIVING

Let us listen to the words of our Lord —

"WERE there none found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger?"

Let us picture —

Ten lepers. What an amount of misery is contained in that statement. Ten men, cut off from their kind, wandering, unhealable. And then a gleam of hope comes into their lives: They hear of Jesus. Imagine this hope growing. Their anxiety as the time comes to test it. They stand afar off — crying. Hear their cry: "Jesus, Master, have mercy." What mingling of hope and fear as our Lord pauses. Then the com-

mand: "Go and show yourselves unto the priests." And as they go the thrill of restoration. But only one comes back. There are not found that return to give glory to God save this stranger.

Consider first —

That this self-centered attitude of the lepers was not exceptional. Our Lord found very little gratitude in the course of his ministry. We should have thought that out of those whom he had healed of dreadful diseases; out of all those freed from despairing helplessness and trouble and brought back sane and sound to the enjoyment of life; out of all those lepers and maniacs; out of those paralysed men who through his word knew once more the joy of movement; those deaf men who heard once more the sounds of life and the voices of their children; those blind men who, after years of darkness, saw again the coming of the dawn and the gleam of loved faces; that out of all these there had been some to be with him at the end. But we hear of none; they took this gift of God, and went their way.

Consider second —

What God has done for you. You are here, in retreat; what does that mean? There is the history of a life back of that; of the successive

steps by which God has led you. They have been blessed or painful; you have followed readily, or you have pulled back from God's hand like the child who wants its own will. But you are here to-day at Jesus' feet; so far the love of God has brought you. Are you thankful to that love?

Let us pray then —

For thankfulness.

O Blessed Lord, who in thy earthly life so experienced the thanklessness of human nature, grant me the virtue of thankfulness, that I may never cease to adore thee for the greatness of thy love toward me.

. . . . . .

When the first real peace came to the Church which had been striving for its life in the Roman Empire, the peace which followed the Edict of Constantine, Christians came back from their exile by thousands; out of islands of the sea; out of deserts where their weary eyes had for years looked out over the drifting sand; out of mines where they had toiled in the hopeless darkness; out of prison, bearing back the mark of rack and scourge. We can imagine the joy of being once more free in the daylight, the joy of meeting in families whose union had seemed irretrievably broken, the hymns of praise, above all, which now

went up unchecked about the Altar of the Church, where no shadow of fear any longer hung about the worshippers, but where all was light and joy, and, above all, Thanksgiving.

Yes, there is the word, thanksgiving. That, more than any thing else, must have dominated those lives newly freed from the fear of the persecutor. One wonders how long it was before that note lost its dominance. We feel, I think, in our own experience, how hard it is to keep any vigor of thankfulness unless there be upon us the stress of a present deliverance. We find it difficult to keep clear to us the ever-present goodness of God in the daily deliverance of our lives. Yet it is there, the mercy of God. It is there, the basis and the obligation of thankfulness which we do ill to neglect. It is one of the constant elements of Christian duty that we owe to ourselves (not to put it on other ground) to make a part of our experience, if we would have that experience complete. The Church never ceases to hold before us an ideal in this matter, in that it makes thanksgiving a constant element of *worship*. That the Christian Church makes thanksgiving a part of all daily offices shows the value attached to the virtue, and the emphasis. And then, surely, it is suggestive that the one divinely insti-

tuted act of worship bears the name Eucharist, Thanksgiving.

Yet one feels that thanksgiving is not at all a common virtue; is convinced of it first of all from one's own experience. One looks back over life and it strikes one, What a thankless life it has been. Such blessings of God, such constant evident presence of the Divine Love, and so little response! The words we are so familiar with in the General Thanksgiving,— words by which the Church undoubtedly does what it can to teach and impress us — drift back to us: "All Thy goodness and loving kindness to us and to all men." What a basis for thankfulness is there!

But it is true — is it not — that the average human being is much more prone to grumble than to give thanks? And there seems to be a curious basis for this fact,— a basis which emphasises the duty of thanksgiving. That is; it is the exceptional and the occasional which impress us,— impress us much more than the usual: We make a great stir over an eclipse or a comet; we pay no attention to a sunrise. Yet both are in the order of nature! So most of us are impressed by an illness, a sorrow, a trouble, in a way which indicates it quite exceptional in our experience, and that therefore most of our life is smooth and

placid; and therefore again, if it is the smooth and the placid which are proper material for thanksgiving, most of our life is such. It is true — is it not — a wrong impresses us more than a favor; a trouble than a joy; the languor of illness, more than the vigor of health? The ninety-nine days we have been well attract no attention; the hundredth day when we are ill stands out in our experience. The desires which are gratified are not emphatic; the one ungratified desire — how important it is! It is the child over again: the box full of toys yields no pleasure because there is one wanting.

And then again; we are wont to pass over our privileges, pleasures, daily blessings, without any uplift of the heart to the Father of all Mercies because of a tacit assumption that they *belong* to us. They are rights; and when they are withdrawn we are defrauded. It sounds very absurd, of course, but it really does seem as though most people were persuaded that all the pleasures and all the successes, and all the peace of their lives was of their own making. It is the due reward of their virtuous conduct: and all the sorrow, pain, and failure, is the work of God; the work of a malignant, or at any rate, very mysterious interference with the affairs of life which were running smoothly till God interfered. God takes

a child, and we feel very bitter about that — it is a great strain on our religion. The child that God does not take — how about that? Is this what we think of God; that he is an agent who troubles life mostly? We do not like to put it in that crude way, No. But it lies implied in our forgetfulness of God in prosperity, and our assumption that pleasure is our *due*.

Of course, the truth is (we acknowledge the truth when attention is called to it) that all things are from God: pleasure as well as pain; and all alike — could we understand — mercies, and therefore grounds of thankfulness. God is good and seeks our good in all his work. That is one of the commonplaces which needs insisting on. It is often the evident things we have least grasp of.

Now so far as we lack thankfulness, one reason may perhaps be a lack of analysis; a lack of due consideration of life. What *is* my life, that I need to be thankful for it?

But first, let us recall what thankfulness is. It is not an impulsive emotion, called out by an exceptional occurrence or passing event. The emotion of gratitude which we feel in some *unusual* situation is well enough, but it is not the virtue of gratitude. Thankfulness, as a Christian virtue, is a permanent attitude of soul, founded on due consideration of facts. It is the

answer by man to God's dealing with his *whole* life. There is a decided difference between the vivid emotion we feel at the gratification of some wish, or the escape from some danger, and the steady perpetual gratification we feel towards God for "all his goodness and loving kindness" which finds expression in what he *denies* as in what he gives. You remember the man who burst into gratitude over the wonderful providence of God who, when his horse slipped on the edge of the precipice, yet saved him from going over. And the answer of his friend that he knew something much more wonderful; — He had ridden past the place many times, and the horse had never even slipped. Our escapes are indeed wonderful, but I suppose most of all are those that we know not of. We can all now look back to our earlier life, and see that again and again we have passed through crises, have walked all unappreciating upon the edge of precipices. I did not understand then the danger of my association, but it missed, by a hair's breadth, that I did not lose my faith. That was a very dangerous moral situation that I placed myself in: What was it that saved me? Surely no strength of my own; my will was already undermined; no, God withheld *opportunity,* and so I was saved. O God, how often hast thou saved me!

But to go on. The General Thanksgiving is a very wonderful analysis of our proper spiritual attitude toward God. I would recommend it for detailed meditation. Now I would just take one or two points suggested by it.

Our Creation: There are moments when we are tempted to question whether life *is* a blessing. Mostly they are not very serious; they are the outcome of a passing irritation or a failure. But one can imagine deeper moments, in some irreparable disaster, some settled sorrow; some chronic suffering, when the question becomes more intense, the conviction more pressing, that life in our own case at least, has been but loss and disaster. How then can we thank God for it? And I suppose just for existence we could not. If life means the pleasure of living, if it means selfish gratification of the senses or of the intellect or of the imagination, then there are plenty of cases in which it is hardly worth while. To be able to thank God for our creation we must have some wider outlook on life than mere animal existence. Life is a blessing only as seen in the light of the Divine Purpose in it.

Life is the first step in a process which issues in the everlasting joy of the being who is created — a joy that we miss sadly the point of, because we try to estimate it in terms of self-gratification;

but which can only be understood when we get at the spiritual point of view, that the joy of heaven is the joy of being with God and perfectly serving God. To bless God for creation, we must see that creation is the gift of opportunity to choose God, and through that choice to attain to eternal felicity; to see in the eternal life of heaven, not a reward tossed to us in compensation for the sorrows and toils of life, but the real end for which we were created, and for which the circumstances of our life answer for training and preparation, at least in part.

Creation springs out of God's love, and its end is to bring into existence beings who can know God's love and can love him in return. Creation of course adds nothing to the blessedness of God. And yet there is a point of view from which we are obliged to think of it as calling into existence a new happiness,— the happiness of making himself known to those he has created and the happiness diffused through the world in the souls of those who answer to his love.

Let us pause a moment to take in this point: that we are made in such wise as to know and love God, and that is *why* we *are* made. We sometimes appreciate things better by coming at them from the negative side. For example, what would our life be without God — without any light from

another world streaming into it? It would be the life of a delicately organised animal of course; but all that we sum up under the word *spirituality* would be wanting. There would be nothing to check or control animalism. There would be no hope, no future, no conviction of a broader justice than any we can see, which should ultimately set right the imperfections and wrongs of life. No thought of anything higher than oneself or better. *Life,* a flash of consciousness between two limitless oceans of nothingness. *Life,* just a pitiful glimpse of possibilities which are torn from us almost as soon as we perceive them.

Can you imagine anything more awful than that? It is *God,*— the possibility of knowing and loving him,— which blesses life, and which prevents even the best things of life from being poisoned, by giving them eternity.

There is one thing which we have to guard against; our perception of the reality of things is apt to be clouded by present pain and sorrow. This shuts out distant considerations. We live so much in the present! But remember, that when God creates a human being he must foresee that much of pain and sorrow will befall it, and none the less he creates it. He foresaw all that has befallen you; yet foreseeing, he created. What does that mean? Why, it can only mean this:

That by creating you, God put within your reach a gift which is without comparison greater than any pain suffered by the way. We act the same way when we give our children education. We are placing in their hands instruments which may profit, but at the same time may be easily used to their destruction. We risk the loss.

And if ever we are tempted to doubt of the blessing of creation, and to push from us with impatience the thought that we owe gratitude therefor; if in the midst of hard trial we are tempted to denounce life and all it brings; it may help us to think of our past trials and our attitude towards them. There have been so many things in our lives which we so resented when they came — struggled against, opposed, yet now that we can look back, they are blessings. God was wise and we were very foolish. Let that teach us in the present and for the future. Teach us to be grateful to God for all.

We thank thee for our creation, because it is the act of love, a love which leads us and shapes our way with infinite wisdom, and which we know is leading on to eternal joy. In this life itself, if we look at it through eyes lighted by God's revelation, there is abundant joy. But the crowning joy, the joy of knowing God perfectly and of seeing that all our lives here have been the leading of

love, and all eternity the fruition of love — when we see that, then all our nature will break out into thanksgiving to the God who made us.

God is leading me to himself; at bottom, that is what I mean by the providence of God. Not God's rule over the world, but God's special thought of *me*. God has a special will for my life. He wills my salvation, and he wills it under certain circumstances, and in a special way. It is not only true that I am not in life by chance, but by the creative act of God; but more — I am in the particular place and state of life that I am by the special will of God. Providence does not mean the special interference of God at times, but the providing of God at all times.

It is because it has held this point of view consistently, that the Christian religion has avoided all over-emphasis and all morbid insistence upon the "ills of life." Life is not a punishment. Material things are not the work of evil, from which we shall finally be set free. Life is not a nuisance and a bore to be got through somehow. But this world is God's world, beautiful and good. And this life of God-given opportunity of growth, of service, in which we may fit ourselves for a higher service hereafter. There is, to be sure, always the dark back-ground of possible loss; but as what we choose is matter of freedom,

the possibility of evil choice does not overload the picture with gloom.

And we do well to keep our thoughts upon the *blessings* of life. How many there are for most of us. We wander through the picture gallery and stop here and there before what impresses. Hardly two persons will stop before the same picture. What each is impressed with is determined by the education that he has received. So it is in life: we get out of life what we have prepared ourselves to get out of it. We see what we have trained ourselves to see. We are familiar with persons who look on dark side or light side. One, perhaps, an invalid — overwhelmed with care and poverty — always meets you with a smile. The other, with no special care or trouble, is always in the depth of woe. Temperament, we say, and begin hunting about among remote ancestors to account for it. Yet it is true that we largely make — certainly develop — temperament.

And the daily blessings are such constant ground for thanks. We are quite apt to underrate their number and importance. Those flashes of happiness which come from time to time in the course of the day; the steady glow of pleasure and contentment which come from intercourse with those we love; the solid good of congenial friendships, the satisfaction of work well done; the

sense of having accomplished our duty; the blessings which come from prayer and worship and sacrament; All the *great* joys of life,— who can number them? And in any one life, or in the world at large, must they not be vastly out of proportion to the pain and evil?

Yet, some may say: This is all very well and true, no doubt, in the long run and in the average life. But *my* life is not average, but exceptional. Blessings do not predominate there. I am deprived of the things I want; I suffer pain, I fail to attain my ends. Altogether life is dark; and while I am trying not to be rebellious, at the same time I do not see how I can be very thankful. To say that I am thankful would be hypocrisy.

Now there are one or two things to be said about that. It is not contended that blessings and pleasures are the same thing. Things may be great blessings to us, which are not at all pleasures. We are apt to mistake, and think nothing not pleasurable a blessing or thing to be thankful for. We talk about blessings in disguise, but are not anxious to have them come that way. And yet, in the wisdom of God, that is often the best way. Perhaps God sees that the deeper blessings of the life of love and union can be ours only as the way is cut for them through the selfishness or worldliness or hardness of our lives. "You have suf-

fered long and greatly," said Bp. Lloyd to Lord Liverpool. "Yes; but knowing what I know now, for all the world can give I would not have been spared one hour or one pang of illness." We do not like discipline and are slow to comprehend the meaning and opportunity of pain. Yet meaning and opportunity it certainly has. And we should do well to keep a note of thankfulness for the blessings which have not seemed so when God's wisdom has overruled our ignorance, and through the light affliction of the moment has wrought for us the more exceeding weight of glory.

Then there is the tendency to overlook or disregard what God has given while dwelling upon what we want and cannot get. When we have set our heart on one thing, all others seem worthless. Life is often poisoned by the wilful refusal to be satisfied with the abundance we have because of the little we have not.

Such distorted judgment and obliquity of vision is to be watched against as involving ingratitude to God. We do not all have the same blessings, nor do all have all the blessings there are. But each has his own; and if we will fix the mind on them and try to estimate the greatness of them, we will surely find great cause for thankfulness.

And we are to remember that the way in which

our lives are ordered is not the result of the action of blind forces, but all things are ordered with reference to our salvation. Each one of us is an individual case for God to deal with, and he deals as we need. And if we need what seems to us hard training and strict discipline, then surely we should be the more watchful to make good use of it.

Let us, then, as we turn to our lives in self-examination, be sure we note the sins of ingratitude there, and let us be sure, too, that we note the many, many, things in them in which the love and mercy of God shine out. God's mercies are more than we deserve — it is a platitude; but they are also more than we ever attain, because in our blindness and our sin, we are always resisting what is best for us.

"O that my people would have hearkened unto me; for if Israel had walked in my ways, I should soon have put down their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. He should have fed them also with the finest wheat flour, and with honey out of the stony rock should I have satisfied them."

THE END

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